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# Claiming Big Sur: How Places Enter Semiosis

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Claiming Big Sur: How Places Enter Semiosis

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The goal of this research is to see how spaces and bodies come to be imbued with meanings, more specifically how spaces are discursively constructed in ways that limit or allow certain types of persons to interact with the space in particular ways. By looking at how different people speak about natural areas we can understand how "American wilderness" ideologies are survived through discursive constructions of these spaces, often ignoring Indigenous communities' land relations—past and present—and producing racialized and classed imaginaries of what types of people should be interacting with nature and how. This linguistic anthropological research examines the discursive practices through which Big Sur, California, becomes imbued with semiotic relations that construct it as a racialized and classed space. Through discourse analyses of information boards and vlogs about Big Sur, and of the website of a non-profit retreat center in Big Sur, I study how dominant semiotic relations become embedded in imaginaries about the region and reproduce settler colonial structures. My analyses use linguistic anthropological theorizations of citationality and language and materiality.

The thesis of Doğa Tekin is approved.

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## Introduction

In the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns in the early months of 2020, many people in the U.S. began flocking to "the outdoors." For city-dwellers especially, there was no better time to "reconnect with nature," for not only did nature offer an escape from the city, but it also provided spaces and activities with lower potential for the spread of the Coronavirus. Naturalist activities such as birdwatching, outdoor sports such as kayaking, and general outdoor recreation in national parks all saw record increases compared to previous years[1] (U.S. National Park Service 2020). Accompanying these surges was the explosion of public interest in trends such as "forest bathing[2]" (Doheny 2020) and "van life[3]" (Bomey 2021).

One driving force of this public urge to get outside and into nature was the hyper-circulated documentations of individuals' nature excursions—especially those who can be categorized as "influencers"—through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. A look at nature-themed content created by many influencers brings forth a noticeably raced and classed experience of interacting with nature. These observations have led me to question how natural spaces are being discursively constructed in ways that limit or allow certain types of people to use the spaces in particular ways. According to these discourses, who is able to "reconnect with nature" and how are they supposed to do so? And how are the lifestyles that give one frequent access to natural areas branded?

My research examines these questions through analyses of various discourses about Big Sur, California, with particular attention to semiotic constructions of popular destinations in the

[1] This is based on visitor data with respect to the months where the parks did not have pandemic-related closures.
[2] An activity where a group of people are guided through the forest in a meditative, therapeutic, and reflexive way.
[3] A trend where people convert vans into functional homes and travel, often to parks across the country, while living in their vans.

region. Through discourse analyses of vlogs about Big Sur, the information boards in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park[4], and the website of the Esalen Institute (a private retreat center on the coast of Big Sur), I study the language that these different groups use to construct ownership and expertise of the area, and to perform "the Big Sur experience" as a brand. Within these performances, I analyze how Big Sur becomes constructed as a raced and classed place permeated with colonial ideologies and land relations. Finally, I look at a vlog with notable citational gaps (Briggs & Baumann 1992; Butler 1993), in their construction of Big Sur, the website of the Esselen Tribe of Monterrey County (ETMC), and news articles discussing a recent land purchase by ETMC to pinpoint citational gaps in constructions of Big Sur, created by contestations of hegemonic narratives about nature- and land-relations in the region. The larger goal of this research is to see how spaces and bodies come to be imbued with meanings. More specifically, I am interested in how nature is branded to serve an upper-middle class white public; how the same performances of nature as brand reinforce settler colonial ideologies and land relations and actively contribute to the erasure of the original inhabitants of the land and their relationships with it, past and present; and how these performances are contested through specific semiotic mechanisms.

## Contextualizing Big Sur

Often referred to as "the greatest meeting of land and sea," Big Sur is an unincorporated territory that envelopes California's famous Scenic Highway One. Contrary to the public imaginary, the name "Big Sur" does not actually refer to a single national park, but an

[4] This is a highly frequented state park in Big Sur.

approximately 90-mile coastal region between San Francisco and Los Angeles[5]. Given this, it is a popular stop for those traveling between the two cities. But its popularity reaches far beyond California residents–known for its breathtaking views, it is a highly valorized tourist destination, landing it a spot on most U.S.-based travel influencers' bucket list[6]. Apple even named its 2020 software update "Big Sur," further solidifying it as a natural area iconized with national imaginaries of America.

With its redwood forests and cliff-views of the Pacific Ocean, Big Sur has garnered attention from a variety of publics throughout history. The complicated dynamics between these publics is a crucial element that sets the area apart from other nationally renowned parks and natural spaces. The original caretakers of this stretch of land were the Ohlone peoples (also known as Costanoan and Rumsen) in the northern part, the Esselen peoples in the middle (where much of the most highly visited parts of Big Sur exist today), and the Salinan peoples in the southern part. These communities' relations to their land, cultures, languages, religions, and each other first became violently disrupted by the establishment of three Spanish missions in the area in 1770, when they were captured, enslaved, forced to convert to Catholicism, and forbidden to speak their native languages and practice their cultural practices. Following the Mexican Revolution, the lands of these missions were divided into *ranchos*, and given out as land-grants to Mexican Catholics. The Native communities were released from the missions as they had become secularized, and some Natives began working on the new *ranchos*. Despite their forced assimilation into Spanish Catholicism carried out by the missions, the tribes made great efforts to

[5] Big Sur is often noted as the stretch from Carmel to San Simeon, but there is no exact designation as Big Sur, so there is some variation in what the boundaries are.
[6] This is based on data that is analyzed later in the paper.

preserve their cultures, rituals, and communities. However, the Indigenous populations of the area were essentially landless.

During the Mexican-American War, California was seized by the United States, rendering the U.S. government as the owner of the region under U.S. law. This was shortly followed by the 1862 Homestead Act–an act that designated the lands of Big Sur as public lands to be settled on by new settlers under the ideology of *terra nullius*[7]. Many of today's landmarks in the area were named after these homesteaders[8]. A decade or two later, a new public started arriving to the land, significantly altering the landscape; with a growing interest in extractive practices, a tan bark industry began to form. As a result of this, several landings were constructed along the Big Sur coast to ship out resources such as redwood lumber and limestone. This was followed by a gold rush boom, further growing the population of the area. The name "Big Sur" was petitioned by residents in the early 20th century as the settlers began to establish a new identity for the area. Following the increasing attention to the preservation of land and natural resources, and as a reaction to the devastating and exploitative practices of logging and mining in the area, many homesteaders began to sell or donate their land to the state of California, allowing for the establishment of some of the primary state parks in Big Sur today[9].

Shortly after, in 1937, Highway One was built. The construction was funded federally and through state funding and carried out by prison inmates who temporarily resided in prison camps set up in various spots. With dynamite blasting through the rocks and canyons, the construction was devastatingly destructive for the land and its residents, changing both the landscape and the identities of Big Sur once again. The new road ushered in new publics that

[7] A Latin phrase that translates to "land belonging to no one." I will discuss this in more detail later in the paper.
[8] Some examples are Pfeiffer, Molera, and Bixby.
[9] Some examples are Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, John Little State Park, and Andrew Molera State Park.

were very influential on the current imaginaries of Big Sur; the artists, writers, Beatniks, and hippies. One of the most notable figures from this era is the artist and writer Henry Miller, who settled in Big Sur in 1944. Miller was a leading counterculture figure who wrote many books that were banned in the U.S. and was especially influential to the Beatnik generation. The Henry Miller Memorial Library at Big Sur is an active organization today that provides many events for the local Big Sur community, along with preserving his legacy in the region.

Following the Beat generation, Big Sur became a magnet for hippies in the 1960s. A great contributor to drawing this community to Big Sur was the founding of the Esalen Institute by Michael Murphy and Dick Price. The Esalen Institute is a non-profit organization, as well as a spa and spiritual retreat center, that became the central grounds for the "Human-Potential Movement[10]," and continues to be an influential organization in the New Age movement[11]. The Institute offers educational workshops, seminars, and thematic retreats where they carry out spiritual and religious practices that draw from and perform traditional and sacred practices from various cultures and communities around the world. While being highly influential, Esalen and the movements it has led have been rightfully criticized for their appropriative practices, and the ethical implications of humanistic techniques that center the self, leading people to adopt spiritual materialism and narcissism. Furthermore, Esalen has a complicated history of conflict with various Esselen communities; the organization has ignored pleas from the Esselen Nation to stop practicing Esselen rituals and ceremonies, amongst many other problematic behaviors[12].

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[10] The premise of the Human-Potential Movement is that people can achieve their "full potential" through 'non-traditional' therapies, methods out of disciplines such as humanistic psychology, and Eastern healing practices. Some notable figures are Allan Watts, Aldous Huxley, and Abraham Maslow.

[11] The New Age movement was prevalent in Western countries between the 1970s and 90s and involved various spiritual practices and beliefs emphasizing "higher spiritual awareness" through practices like astrology, yoga, and crystal healing (Gurrentz n.d.).

[12] The Esalen Institute's relationship with Esselen natives is evidently complicated and I have limited resources to thoroughly understand the dynamics at hand. Some of these complications are due to the fact that the Esselen have multiple representations (ETMC and OCEN), and the Institute has relied on their relationship with leaders of the

Above all, the Esalen Institute actively contributes to the erasure of the Esselen people while residing on land that was stolen from them, as well as profiting from branding the Esselen Tribe.

Today, the descendants of the Esselen are primarily represented by two organizations: the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County (ETMC), and the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation (OCEN). While both organizations have applied for federal recognition and fulfilled all required steps to receive it, the Esselen remain unrecognized. Alongside 134 other California tribes, the Esselen Tribe's federal recognition was never legally terminated; rather it was removed from the list of recognized tribes due to the negligence of BIA agents who were responsible for purchasing land for Indigenous communities under the Congressional Homeless California Indian Appropriation Acts[13]. Therefore, not only are they not federally recognized, but no Esselen community has been federally granted any land. Esselen peoples effectively remained landless since the establishment of the Spanish missions on their land, until the ETMC made a land purchase in 2020.

Given the complex dynamics of care and ownership of the lands in the Big Sur region across history, studying how Big Sur is being branded today can shed light on important issues of human-nature relations, access to natural spaces along the lines of race and class, and mechanisms of Indigenous erasure. By looking at how imaginaries of Big Sur are constructed, we are also called to question the ways that settler colonialism has shaped our land-relations and the ontological grounds through which we experience and embody natural spaces. Therefore, Big Sur is a rich context for analyzing how spaces and embodiments enter semiosis, and how the semiotic life and materiality of a place can be co-constitutive. In the rest of this paper, I will look

ETMC to continue practices and behaviors deemed inappropriate by OCEN. Because I am unable to write more on this at this moment, I am going to be focusing on the organization's role in branding Big Sur and the ETMC's land purchase independently of one another.

[13] This information is from the website of the OCEN. http://www.ohlonecostanoanesselennation.org/index.html.

at how Big Sur is constructed from a physical space into an imagined place through discursive references to citational networks that render its semiotic relations legible.

## Methods & Epistemologies

### On Epistemologies

I started this project the summer of 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions and closures were still widespread. As a result of the circumstances, I designed my methods to primarily engage with virtual data. Though this may seem like a limitation, it allowed me to engage with methodological frameworks of the growing field of virtual anthropology (e.g., Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Juris 2012; Milan 2015). Given this, a primary epistemological consideration was framing Big Sur as an assemblage[14], composed not only of the interactions of bodies (human and non-human) in the material space designated as Big Sur, but also of a *place* that is actively constructed through discourse that takes place across virtual and non-virtual spaces. Therefore, my field sites are simultaneously Big Sur as a space that exists materially, Big Sur as a place that exists semiotically, and the respective virtual platforms from which I collected discourse.

Framing my research in this way not only allowed me to expand how I am conceiving my research site, but it also gave me the opportunity to analyze multivocal discourses of Big Sur (Bakhtin 1982). By looking at discourses across virtual and material sites, and across different virtual platforms, I noticed various genres of discourse that covered different actors, had different citational characteristics, and exhibited different types and degrees of citational power[15].

[14] I use *assemblage* here following Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations: an understanding of bodies constituted and constitutive of other bodies, focusing on the rhizomatic networks between bodies that constitute larger bodies rather than the body as an object itself (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).
[15] I discuss power and citationality more in depth on page 11 and 12.

For some genres, such as the travel influencers, the affordances of the digital architectures of their respective online platforms further affected their citational power. Therefore, by drawing from multiple discourses, I can simultaneously highlight where and how problematic ideologies become circulated and bring to the fore productive disruptions to these ideologies.

Furthermore, I chose to center citationality and citational gaps following the discourse around critical citational practices in academia led by scholars such as Sarah Ahmed, Katherine McKittrick, and Zoe Todd. Ahmed, who works at the intersection of feminist, queer, and race studies, brings our attention to how the colonial, heteropatriarchal citational structures that construct academic disciplines limit their narratives to a single voice (Ahmed 2013). McKittrick, a Black scholar whose work focuses on the liberatory qualities of creative cultural expressions by Black artists, calls us to generate new citational networks in our academic work as a means of disrupting the and freeing ourselves from hegemonic citational networks that academia is built upon and continues to reinforce (McKittrick 2021). Todd, a Métis/otipemisiw scholar who studies human-animal relations in the context of colonialism and environmental change through a critical Indigenous feminist lens, highlights the necessity for critical citational practices that engage with the scholarship of Indigenous thinkers in order to disrupt the colonial citational networks within academia (Todd 2016). Following the work of these scholars, I designed my research to parallel their critical attention to citational practices in academia by looking at how citational practices reproduce "the world around certain bodies" (Ahmed 2013), as well as how counter-hegemonic citational practices organically occur in discourses.

## On Methods

My methods center four different discourses of Big Sur, each one mapping onto specific actors—travel vloggers; the Esalen Institute; CA State Parks and affiliates; and the ETMC. Each

of these actors embody different relationships to the land, yet some of the discourses citationally reproduce very similar narratives of Big Sur, while others markedly contradict these narratives.

I acquired my data on travel influencers through YouTube vlogs about Big Sur. I chose the vlogs based on a multiplicity of criteria: degree of public engagement, including views, comments, likes, dislikes, and followers; the racial identities of vloggers[16]; the centering of the vlogger's embodied experiences in the narrative; the degree of adherence to generic characteristics of travel guides, including the presence of specific words, phrases, and frames frequently used to describe Big Sur in travel media about Big Sur. My data for the Esalen Institute is from the home page and "About" page of their website[17]. I chose Esalen for its New Age practices, upper-class white customer/audience base, controversial appropriative practices, history of conflict and problems with the Esselen peoples, and its brand identity. My data on ETMC's land purchase was found on many different websites of notable news media, as well as the ETMC's own website.

In addition to collecting my virtual data, I made two trips to various locations in Big Sur and photographed information boards and trails. These photos capture heavily trafficked trails and areas in Big Sur. The information boards are in central parts of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park; therefore, they are very easily accessed by visitors. Initially, I had planned on interviewing park rangers as well, but after trying to get in contact via many different channels for months to no avail, I decided to re-consider my methods. As a result of this, I made another trip to Big Sur to

[16] This was decided based on my own presumptions of how they would be racialized by the public, as they did not explicitly identify themselves with respect to racial categories.
[17] While these pages do not fully capture the role of the Esalen Institute in the branding of Big Sur, they do give us important information about how the organization brands itself. The home page is the default page when one goes on the website, therefore it is frequently visited and designed with this in mind. The "About" page is the page that is designated to tell people about the organization, so it gives us a glimpse of the narrative they are curating about themselves.

ask people who ran local businesses in the region to virtually interview them at a later time due to the risks of conducting in-person interviews during the pandemic. While many seemed interested and shared contact information in-person, I failed to get a response from any of them after multiple attempts of contacting them. As I continue my research, I hope to be able to incorporate more in-person interactive data, however, for the time being, I decided that I had plenty to work with.

Because my data was multimodal, instead of transcribing everything, I identified two themes that appeared across discourses: the indexing of settler colonial ideologies to brand Big Sur as a classed white public space, and constructions of the Indigenous communities of Big Sur, both historically and in contemporary contexts. I analyzed how these themes become materialized in these discourses by approaching them through a semiotic framework, with a specific focus on citationality. Alongside this thematic focus, I also analyzed how authority and expertise is constructed generically with respect to the different genres within which the discourses took place. Additionally, I identified which elements of the counter-discourses in my data constituted citational gaps and analyzed how they may interrupt the reproductions of dominant narratives of Big Sur.

## Theoretical Framework

My linguistic anthropological research is largely concerned with how people's relationships to material things and spaces are mediated through discursive practices. Following Basso (1996), we know that *places* are ideologically mediated, and interactionally created through a wide range of semiotic resources including linguistic, discursive, and sensorial. We also know that spaces

are materially real, and a linguistic anthropology grounded in semiotic approaches invites us to think through the ways in which the materiality and semiotic constructions of spaces and places are co-constitutive. Given this, I am interested in the citational practices that allow for the material space that is Big Sur to enter semiosis, and, in turn, produce material effects and affects.

I am centering citationality as the core mechanism of processes of constructing Big Sur as a place. As I mentioned briefly above, citationality has been theorized as a process constitutive of material realities and specific embodiments. Embodiment has always been centered in theorizations of citationality. One of genealogical roots of this concept is Austin (1975) and Searle's (1965) theorizations of how speech acts are not only representational, but also productive. Judith Butler has played a key role in building on this concept with her proposition of citationality as the process through which gender is formed, performed, and embodied (Butler 1993). Therefore, the productive characteristic of language produces material realities, which in turn affect discourses.

As they are produced through—and necessarily tied to—bodies (both human and organizations), citations exist within structures of power. Although he does not frame his concept of *habitus* in terms of citationality, Bourdieu theorizes a mechanism of the production and reproduction of structural power that works through embodiment. He proposes that humans become particular subjects through their embodied reproductions of value systems that they were socialized/habituated into (Bourdieu 1972 in Spiegel 2005). Furthermore, these reproductions do not only reproduce the values attached to specific behaviors, subjectivities, or objects; they also reproduce the structures that produced them in the first place, allowing for them to be further transmitted. Therefore, Bourdieu's *habitus* employs a similar citational mechanism as Butler's

theory of performativity, and both theories make a case for how power becomes materialized by and within bodies.

Therefore, looking at citational practices in discourse necessitates an analysis of how speakers[18] construct themselves, and are generically constructed, as authorized speakers. Goffman uses the model of "participation frameworks" to bring our attention to the wide array of structurally distinct positions (participation statuses) that participants may embody within any given interaction (Goffman 1979). Of these positions, he distinguishes "ratified participants" as those who are validated as having a position in an interaction, as opposed to those who may be in proximity of an interaction, but do not share the status of being *in* the interaction, and therefore occupy a "bystander" role. The ratified participant, through their ratification, essentially becomes authorized to partake in the interaction. These distinctions become especially important when considering the different participation statuses afforded by the structures of different media within which interactions take place.

While speakers may be authorized through their participation status, they also authenticate their expertise through indexing specific genres and adhering to the characteristics that render them legible as the genre that is being indexed. On this, Briggs and Bauman write:

> "Genre thus pertains crucially to negotiations of identity and power—by invoking a particular genre, producers of discourse assert (tacitly or explicitly) that they possess the authority needed to decontextualize discourse that bears these historical and social connections and to recontextualize it in the current discursive setting," (Briggs & Bauman 1992, 148).

One of the authors' most crucial contributions to the literature on genre is their conceptualization of genres as necessarily intertextual, meaning that discourses are linked to others, and genres arise not as characteristics inherent to a specific discourse, but as relations between discourses

[18] Speakers here is not just referring to oral speakers but textual speakers as well.

that gain legibility through citational chains. Irvine (1989) refers to a similar process as "chains of authentication," where one may authenticate themselves by generically indexing authority. Irvine describes this construction of power as "derivatively authoritative," noting that a speaker's authority is derived from the citational chains that rely on generic structures that authenticate the role occupied by the speaker as authoritative. Therefore, not only may a speaker construct themselves as authoritative by invoking genres, but also through their degree of adherence to features of the genre that position them as experts.

Irvine also brings up the role authoritative speakers can play in the commodification of objects. She notes that objects are accompanied by "authoritative testimonials," explicitly authenticating the reliability of the speaker, and by the "chains of authentication" that the authoritative testimonials rest on ("the derivatively authoritative"), (Irvine 1989, 258). This suggests that material objects may acquire value through the power of the speakers who citationally circulate the signs that are iconized with and indexically linked to these objects. Language, then, acts as a mediator between people's relationships with objects, and discursive practices are crucial to making semiotic relations of objects recognizable by interpreters (Keane 2003; Shankar 2006).

I want to expand the notion of chains to *networks*—chains suggest a linear process of authorization, but networks emphasize the multi-directionality of citations while still allowing for their additive and derivational effects. A speaker does not only position themselves with respect to a linear chain of expertise, deriving their value through a lineage, but within a large network of expertise, authentication, and authorization where each node *both draws from and reinforces* other nodes' characterizations (as expert, authoritative, etc.). This framework is more in line with Briggs & Bauman's "intertextuality," and suggests that citational practices formally

perform three roles: authenticating an object's objecthood and characteristics by explicitly linking it to a legible network of objects; authenticating the other legible objects in the network; and authenticating the network itself as a structure with recognizable citational power.

I chose to approach my analysis of discourses about Big Sur through the framework of the semiotics of brand, partly because of the focus on citationality in the literature on branding, and because some of the speakers I engage with hold positions that simultaneously construct them as the sole ratified participants, as authorized, expert speakers, and as consumers. This creates an interesting dynamic where they directly play a role in the objectification of Big Sur, and "the Big Sur experience." Objectification is the process through which an object enters semiosis, allowing it to acquire social value and become recognized as valuable (Shankar 2008). Shankar (2008) writes that people may discursively circulate objectifications rather than just objects themselves, allowing for what she calls "metaconsumption," or the consumption of objectifications (92). In my analysis, I argue that travel vlogs circulate objectifications, yielding metaconsumption.

Nakassis (2012) refers to brands as "semiotic objects," noting that they are inherently citational in their form, and their readability depends on consumers' exposure to a brand's "semiotic chains," (628). While the circulation of a brand ultimately plays a large role in its degree of consumption, the circulation of objectifications[19] is also crucial for a brand's success; people discursively claim objectifications to construct their identities in alignment with the social value of the object and gain social status from this alignment (Shankar 2008). Nakassis (2012) brings to our attention that consumers engage with brands as a way of performing their identity, where brands become imbued with lifestyles, and their value and image is co-created by

[19] Here I am referring to the objectification of the brand of Big Sur as a "semiotic object," but also Big Sur as an object itself. The brand of Big Sur becomes objectified through semiotic networks that qualify the "Big Sur experience" in specific ways (e.g., as an experience one *must* have) whereas the objectification of Big Sur would be rendering the place itself as meaningful (e.g., as a home of '60s counterculture).

producers and consumers (629). Given this, metaconsumption becomes especially interesting—it inherently creates an additional distance between the consumer and the object, highlighting differentials of access to the materialities that are being objectified.

These issues of access that come to fore through the metaconsumptive features of branding content become invisibilized through the normalization of the genres within which the content is produced. This normalization is most powerful through the minimization of "intertextual gaps" (Briggs & Baumann 1992), or the spaces created by the distance between a text and its expected generic features. Intertextual gaps allow for the recontextualization of texts/utterances, causing disruptions in citational networks. This concept can be broadened to consider how the same gaps can be present in any citational network (e.g., semiotic networks). Butler (1993) famously discusses 'gaps' in the context of performances of gender, stating that they are spaces through which normative embodiments and ideologies of gender can be contested. For my analysis, I will be using this concept, which I will be calling "citational gaps," to analyze contestations of dominant discourses that brand Big Sur.

## Histories of 'The Wilderness'

While environmentalism in the United States has been driven by and served many different publics, one expression of it, which I will call "recreational environmentalism," has been created for and continues to successfully benefit wealthy white people[20] (Hurley 1995; DeLuca and Demo 2001; Finney 2014). Recreational environmentalism encapsulates the various environmental ideas and movements concerned with preserving an ideological "wilderness" for

[20] The rise of ecotourism has expanded recreational environmentalism to a wider category of wealthy people globally. While this is relevant and interesting, it is beyond the scope of the current iteration of my research.

"public recreation" in nature. The problematics of recreational environmentalism and its ideological groundings have been discussed and criticized in depth by environmental organizers and scholars (e.g., Anderson 2005; Outka 2008; Rashkow 2014) and it is not my intention to give a thorough analysis of this. Instead, I want to focus on how the histories of recreational environmentalism and changing ideologies about the wilderness have constructed natural areas as spaces for affluent white people and have had significant consequences for Native inhabitants of areas designated as national parks. This section will help contextualize some of my analysis that takes place later in the paper.

In an influential piece analyzing and critiquing wilderness ideologies of the 19th century, environmentalist William Cronon describes the role of the frontier in transforming the wilderness into an iconic aspect of American identity. On Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 thesis on the myth of the frontier, Cronon writes that:

> "Easterners and European immigrants, in moving to the wild unsettled lands of the frontier, shed the trappings of civilization, rediscovered their primitive racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions, and thereby refused themselves with a vigor, and independence, and a creativity that were the source of American democracy and national character. Seen in this way, wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American," (Cronon 1996, 13).

Colonizers' relationship to the wilderness, however, was not always in this form. Strongly entangled in biblical connotations, the term "wilderness" was originally used to refer to terrifying, desolate, dark spaces that one would not go to unless they were subjected to it (Cronon 1996). With the emergence of the doctrine of the sublime in the 18th century, the wilderness became a place where one could go to face God; natural landscapes were powerful, divine spaces that were awe-inspiring rather than simply pleasant (Demars 2009). This

transformation was significant in turning nature into an object for poetry, writing, and art that worked toward cultivating an American cultural identity.

**Figure 1** Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm–The Oxbow*, 1836. [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY]

Not all natural landscapes shared the spotlight for their sublimity; the features that caught artists' and intellectuals' attention the most were those such as mountaintops, waterfalls, sunsets, and thunder[21]—features that come to mind when one thinks about the most well-known American national parks today (Demars 2009). In the early-to-mid 19th century, the genre of American landscape painting came into the spotlight with an artist named Thomas Cole. Soon after, the Hudson River School, known as America's first art movement, was established[22] (Avery 2004). Artists like Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, and Albert Bierstadt began efforts to capture the sublime contextualized in a frontier of boundless, untouched wilderness (Fig. 1 & 2). Engaging with the themes of nationalism and nature, artists working in this artistic tradition often

**Figure 2** Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada, California*, 1868. [Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.]

[21] Swamps and grasslands, for example, did not get the same attention.
[22] Thomas Cole is often credited as the founding father of the Hudson River School.

greatly exaggerated features of the landscapes they painted to evoke grandeur. These paintings ultimately cultivated a strong bond between American culture and these landscapes[23].

An evident characteristic of these paintings, and wilderness ideologies at large, was the principle of *terra nullius*—a principle that designated yet-to-be-colonized lands as 'empty' and 'unoccupied'. Like the doctrine of discovery, the claim of *terra nullius* was used to justify European colonization and Indigenous displacement across the world.[24] Areas without Native settlements that were legible to colonizers, and those without signs of agriculture, were especially susceptible to this designation; these areas were, of course, also characterized as 'the wilderness'. The fact that people were able to hold in frame these landscapes of great scale, and hold exhibitions featuring these paintings, fixated on walls, as products to be consumed, displays a material result to the ideology of *terra nullius*. Therefore, the settler colonial gaze on 'the wilderness' innately carried a sense of national ownership of an objectified nature.

This objectification took a slightly different shape with the emergence of the intellectual movement of Transcendentalism. With well-known figureheads such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and John Muir, this movement brought an idealization of nature that was much more spiritual and romantic; one that shed the terror inherent in sublimity. While the divine was still deeply enmeshed in this ideology, this movement marked a turn away from institutionalized religion to find divinity within oneself, and wilderness became the space to practice turning inward (Emerson 1838)—a sentiment echoed by the "Human-Potential Movement" in the 60s, and institutions such as the Esalen Institute today[25]. Like the publics who

[23] I am purposefully avoiding using "American landscapes" to denaturalize the state's ownership of these lands.
[24] While this principle was not explicitly referred to in the U.S., its ideological claims were echoed in the ethos of the establishment of the nation-state.
[25] More on this starting on page 33.

celebrated the sublime, and those of the Human-Potential Movement in the 60s, this movement existed within affluent, white circles of philosophers, artists, writers, and scholars.

Transcendentalism was partly a reaction to the disappearance of nature in the age of growing industrialization. Like the American landscape painters, these writers often depicted highly idealized and romanticized visions of nature, emphasizing an untouched, pure wilderness in stark contrast with the man-made city. Of course, these views of nature were predicated on the European ontology of a human-nature binary and were deeply tied to European values. One of the most notable figures of the movement was John Muir, whose ideas about wilderness remain influential to American social imaginaries of natural areas today. Muir is also well-known for his racist views of Native Americans, who he considered to be disrupting the environment, or disrupting his gaze on 'pristine' natural landscapes. This view is an all-too-familiar mechanism of Indigenous erasure, not just by advocating for Indigenous peoples' physical removal from their lands, but also by flattening them through a colonial gaze.

On Muir's visions of Yosemite, DeLuca and Demo write "Muir's use of religious imagery is crucial in distinguishing Yosemite as a sacred place that deserves comparison not to the exotic spaces of Africa or South America but the sacred places of white civilization. By comparing American wilderness to cathedrals, Muir transforms it from a potentially corrupting place into a divine place that reaffirms America's connection to European civilization," (DeLuca and Demo 2001, 551). Muir is one of the earliest advocates for environmental preservation, and is the founder of the Sierra Club, an environmental preservation organization that is known for its outdoor recreation activities, alongside its advocacy for environmentalist policies. With this, recreational environmentalism centers an ideological wilderness that is inherently tied to whiteness.

However, to exist in the first place, recreational environmentalism–and its resulting institutions such as the Sierra Club—required an American public that was interested in the outdoors. With the influence of the Transcendentalist movement and the Hudson River School, outdoor recreation began to grow in popularity (Haines 1974). These activities were mostly performed by wealthy white city-dwellers who grew to embrace the countryside as a space for escaping the industrial city. While these trips were made on the premise of idealizing a kind of 'primitive' and romantic lifestyle, as the one discussed in Turner's frontier thesis, they often involved going to luxurious estates or resorts with servants and guides (Cronon 1996; Demars 2009). As Cronon puts it, "For them [elite tourists], wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer," (Cronon 1996, 15). Cronon further points out the innate paradox in this construction of the wilderness; only those whose relation to land was "alienated" were able to buy into this ideology of wilderness. Hence, the great interest in preserving natural areas for recreation that was generated by these movements would yield the creation of parks on the premise that nature should be observed from a distance (Cronon 1996; Byers 2021).

This alienation was not a neutral characteristic of early U.S. environmentalism, but one that had severe consequences for Indigenous inhabitants of the lands that became designated as national parks. The violence of the formation of national parks on Indigenous communities was twofold. Firstly, the removal of Indigenous communities inhabiting the areas to be preserved for recreation was deemed necessary for the formation of many national parks[26], including the very first official national park, Yellowstone (Spence 1999). The original inhabitants of Yellowstone were the Eastern and Northern Shoshone, who lived in communities that were loosely associated

[26] While the exact number of Native peoples affected by such displacement policies is unknown, estimates range from 10-173 million globally (Rashkow 2014).

with one another through family relations, language, and culture. The Bannock and Mountain Crow were also seasonal inhabitants of the Rocky Mountains and the area designated as Yellowstone at large. These communities were heavily impacted by the introduction of European diseases from colonizers. Furthermore, colonizers' practices such as the hunting of 'game animals' and extraction of natural resources caused increased competition for food and medicine in the area among Native communities. However, Yellowstone was becoming a "Wonderland" for outdoor recreation, rendering Native hunting and foraging practices disruptive of the resources and spaces necessary to entertain white visitors (Spence 1999). In other words, hunting for sustenance was cast as evil whereas hunting for 'game' was made to be virtuous. After the park's establishment in 1872, park management made it a priority to violently pursue Indigenous inhabitants to ensure that the wilderness area was preserved for white visitors only. Many other parks were established through a similarly violent removal of their lands' Indigenous inhabitants and caretakers.

A secondary consequence of preservation on the basis of the colonial construct of 'wilderness' was the notion of the 'endangered Native', leading some environmentalists of the time to propose "preserving" Natives in the same way that they were advocating for the preservation of the wilderness. George Catlin, another 'father figure' of environmental preservation, for example, paired the buffalo and the Native, suggesting that both should be "preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness" considering their status of "endangerment," (Rashkow 2014, 820). National parks, then, would serve as exhibitions of Native peoples, their cultural practices, and their material cultures, rendering them "specimens" that were akin to nature rather than humans in the human-nature binary.

Catlin's sentiments were echoed by advocates for the preservation of endangered Indigenous languages, among them Franz Boas. Boas is known for his proposition that all languages are equally valuable and that non-European languages should be documented in the interest of building an ethnological and philological record of North American Indigenous cultures. He worked toward developing a large archive of texts from Native communities in the U.S. under the premise that their languages would eventually go extinct, and that the textual documentation of these languages would preserve them to be studied and analyzed. This emphasis on preserving cultures and languages of 'the other'[27] was also central to early ethnographic work (e.g., the work of Bronislaw Malinowski). While Boas' work toward bringing light to the complexity of Native languages was notable, this model of preservation creates a static image of Native cultures and languages, reducing them to a bounded state that does not allow for them to change, hence, enforcing an imaginary that maps Native communities to 'pre-modern' times. This effort for preservation also denied Indigenous communities agency over the documentation of their languages in the interest of producing knowledge (about cultures and languages), but who was this knowledge for?

Contemporary linguistic anthropologists (e.g., Hill 2002; Moore 2006) have written critically about endangered language ideologies, questioning the motives for language preservation, such as ideologies of "universal ownership" that presume Native languages as assets to humanity at large while ignoring the actual interests of Native communities (Debenport 2010; Errington 2003; Hill 2002; Whiteley 2003). Robert Moore suggests that early orientations to language preservation were rooted in the sublime; they approached preservation from the

[27] By 'the other' I am referring to non-European/non-Euro-American communities that became typical objects of anthropological studies, often resulting in their exoticization through a colonial gaze (especially anthropological research from the late 19th - mid 20th centuries).

point of view of Memorialization/Wonder, in other words, preserving a static moment or object that evoked a sense of awe in the viewer (Moore 2006, 298). Once again, this preservationist view is inherently flawed in that neither languages, cultures, peoples, or nature, exist in a static, objectified form. Perhaps most disturbing is the way in which the pathway toward Native extinction is naturalized in such narratives rather than acknowledging the active effort of the U.S. government in destroying Native livelihoods and, at times, exterminating groups of Native populations.

Recreational environmentalism, or environmentalism concerned with preserving the wilderness for public recreation, presumes that the wilderness exists factually rather than acknowledging its construction in tandem with constructions of whiteness and American nationalism. While contemporary environmentalists have approached these problematic foundations of environmentalism in the U.S., these ideologies of the wilderness are still preserved in the public imaginary[28]. My analyses in the latter half of this paper will reveal some of the actors and mechanisms through which crucial elements of these ideologies are actively reinforced, as well as significant contestations of these processes.

## Constructions of Authority & Expertise

In this section, I will analyze the language used by different actors to authorize themselves as expert speakers with respect to the land, specifically Big Sur. The three groups of people whose discourse I will analyze are: contemporary travel vloggers, of 'the state' as it is

[28] Here I am referencing a dominant public imaginary, but I also want to acknowledge that there are active efforts toward returning/restoring land for Native communities to return back to. For example, Shash Jaa' (Bears Ears) National Monument and the Grand Staircase-Escalante were expanded by the Biden Administration in response to resistance and advocacy by Indigenous women and youth, LGBTQ2+ communities, and many others.

constructed and voiced through CA State Parks information boards, and the creators of the Esalen Institute's website. What threads through these narratives is a frequent evocation of a 'view from nowhere', where a situated point of view is substituted for an ideological universal one. In my data, this view is at times constructed explicitly, while at other times assumed by the narrator/actor. The disembodied voice has been critiqued both within and outside of anthropology in contexts such as ethnographic writing and Western scientific writing (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1985; Haraway 1988; McKittrick 2021). My goal, however, is not to critique the use of this voice, but to demonstrate (albeit inexhaustively) how it is used to authorize expertise in each narrative[29]. I will be analyzing how constructions of this point of view occur within performances of genre, and evocations of 19th century wilderness ideologies.

## Travel Vloggers

Travel vloggers authorize their expertise through many different mechanisms, however, within the limits of this paper, I will be focusing on three primary ones: the participation framework afforded by the medium of YouTube; their discursive indexes of expertise; and their minimizing of the citational gaps between 19th century nature literature and art, and today's travel vlogs. These three mechanisms offer characteristics of travel vlog discourses that make them both distinct from, and similar to, those of California State Parks and the Esalen Institute.

Like all social media platforms, YouTube has a distinct digital architecture that yields specific participation frameworks. YouTube allows for user interaction with videos in a few primary ways: liking and disliking the video, writing comments on the video (including tagging

[29] In a more in-depth analysis, I plan to focus on the use of deictic expressions to construct specific relations between the speaker/narrator/actor, consumer of the media, and Big Sur (place and land).

hyperlinked timestamps)[30], rewinding and forwarding, sharing the video, changing video settings (speed, captions, quality etc.), and, at times, pressing hyperlinked icons on videos that take you to other videos or allow you to subscribe to the content creator[31]. YouTube allows for direct user interaction (reactions that creators are likely to see) with content creators in the context of a single video of theirs through liking or disliking their video, subscribing to their account, and commenting (including tagging the creator). Indirectly (reactions and responses that creators are *less* likely to see), one could also make their own video commenting on/responding to the original video and its creator[32]. Additionally, YouTube has recently adopted live-streaming, where vloggers may produce content in real-time and users are allowed to comment in real-time. However, I have never come across this occurring in the context of nature travel vlogs. Given this, responses to these vlogs will typically not be in real-time, creating a framework in which the ratified speaker position will necessarily be held by the content creator(s) of the video; the content creator is inherently authorized as a result of their position in the participation framework of YouTube.


**Figure 3** Six different titles of travel vlogs that include Big Sur.

[30] The comment section also allows users to interact with one another by liking, disliking, and replying to other users' comments.

[31] The term "content creator" was coined and pushed by YouTube administrators in 2011 as a means of promoting and professionalizing people who were influential on YouTube (formerly known as "YouTube stars"). The term "influencer" became popularized much later, around 2017, as a term that could be used across different social media platforms (Lorenz 2019). Throughout this paper, I will be using the words vlogger and content-creator since my data for this is specifically concerned with YouTube content creators.

[32] This stands in contrast with, for example, TikTok, where posting video responses to others' posts is structured into the platform in various ways (e.g., duets, greenscreen), inviting dialogue between creators.

The ratified speaker position is further authorized through consistently high engagement with their content, including likes, views, comments, and subscribers. Additionally, a vlogger may seek to become a verified account if they have over 100,000 subscribers, authorizing themselves my explicitly positioning themselves in YouTube's network of authentication. Often highly popular vloggers also receive products from various companies that they then integrate into their videos as product placement. Not only does this serve as advertisement for those companies, but it further authorizes the vlogger; the product placement may directly index that the vlogger enjoys or approves the product, while indirectly indexing that the vlogger has a sufficiently significant following to be a face of the product they are advertising. Vloggers become recognized as influential content creators through these characteristics, in turn authorizing them as expert speakers for the objects of their videos.

Travel vloggers additionally engage in discursive practices through which they explicitly construct themselves as experts. One prominent example of this can be seen in the titles of travel vlogs (Fig. 3)[33]. With the phrase "how to visit," the first title (from the top) suggests that there is a single—or perhaps an ideal—way of visiting Big Sur, authorizing the vlogger as the entity that can provide the viewer of the video with *the way*. The word "guide" as seen in four of the titles featured in this group of vlogs directly indexes the vloggers' expertise, once again, by putting them in a position of providing the guidance that the viewer is seeking. While some of the vlogs in this group are solely about Big Sur, the final three (on the bottom) include Big Sur as part of their focus on a 'California road trip,' two of them prefacing it with the word 'ultimate.' In the vlog titled "California Road Trip TRAVEL GUIDE | Big Sur," Erik Conover mirrors this language:

[33] The vlog titles in this group are partly from the vlogs I analyze later in this paper, and partly randomly collected from vlogs that come up first on YouTube when searching about Big Sur.

**Transcript 1**

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 Erik; | My mission (.) in this three-part video series (.) is simple (1) |
| 6 | show you. the? top destinations (.) TO experience (.) |
| 7 | on the ULtimate road-trip? |
| 8 | <fast> through the state </fast> (.) of CAlifornia. |
| 9 | starting here? (.) |
| 10 | in Big Sur. |

With "ultimate [California] road trip" in the titles and transcribed vlog, and "top destinations" in line 6 of the transcription, these vlogs evoke a similar narrative as the first title, where there is a single ideal way of doing the "California road trip," and these vloggers have the expertise to share *the way*. Additionally, these titles rely on viewers' recognition of *the* California road trip as an experience that one should aspire to have, allowing for the genre of California road trip travel vlogs to be valorized, creating an investment in an ideal way of having that experience for the viewer. By evoking these ideologies about travel, these vlogs construct an experience that the viewer *should want* to have, and a vlogger who is able to show them *how* to have it.

Another way in which vloggers authorize themselves by performing the travel vlog genre is through recommending the same sites as other vloggers who produce content about Big Sur. Out of the five primary vlogs by white creators that I am analyzing, all five featured McWay Falls, four featured Bixby Bridge, and three featured Pfeiffer Beach. These places are constructed as 'landmarks' through various media about Big Sur, including these vlogs, and are all products of colonial imaginaries of California as a place rich in resources and natural beauty, and one that was Americans' God-given right to own[34]. Not only is this authorization achieved by visiting the same Big Sur sites as other vloggers, but also by featuring Big Sur as an object of

[34] Bixby Bridge takes the name of Charles H. Bixby, a businessman from the East Coast who ended up purchasing and developing the land around Bixby Creek for harvesting and transporting lumber and other materials. McWay Falls is on a site that was 'owned' by Christopher McWay, another 'pioneer' who homesteaded the area around McWay Creek. Pfeiffer Beach is named after the Pfeiffer family who were also early homesteaders in the Big Sur area.

their vlog in the first place. One vlogger, under the name of Crosby Grace Travels, says "it's [Big Sur] been on my bucket list[35] for so long," indicating that as a travel vlogger, Big Sur is a spot that you would be expected to visit. All five of the travel vloggers I am focusing on have travel content about places all around the world. Their focus on Big Sur, then, highlights it as a place to visit amongst other places that are constructed as popular travel destinations globally. This characterization of Big Sur also serves to reinforce a colonial, nationalistic imaginary of what the U.S. (and its regions) has to *offer*. An example of this can be seen in Erik Conover's vlog:

**Transcript 2**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Erik: | I'm here in the? BEAU:tiful state of CAlifornia |
| 2 | in partnership (.) with Visit California. |
| 3 | on a two-week? long road-trip (.) with my. good friend (.) |
| 4 | Mike Shepherd. |
| 5 Mike: | {plays guitar} |

In line 2, he notes that he is sponsored by Visit California, which both authorizes his expertise and once again constructs Big Sur as a 'must-see' site in California. He evokes the nationalistic imaginary of California's natural beauty by his emphasis and elongation of the word "beautiful" in line 1. Furthermore, he contextualizes his trip within the 'California road-trip' framework by explicitly stating this and displaying things that are iconized with the 'California road-trip' in the public imaginary, such as doing it with close friends and bringing a guitar along the way[36].

These commonalities serve a similar citational purpose as citing seminal figures in anthropological writing; the vlogger indirectly indexes their familiarity with the generic expectations of Big Sur travel vlogs, giving them credibility for having done their research, while simultaneously reinforcing these sites as expected spots to visit both for future visitors who

[35] "Bucket list" in this context refers to a list of experiences a person hopes to have during their lifetime.
[36] These iconic characteristics of the 'California road-trip' can easily be found in popular media such as the famous song "Road Trippin'" by Red Hot Chili Peppers, a quintessential California band.

watched their vlog (students entering the field of anthropology), and for other travel vloggers who will be producing content about Big Sur. While vloggers are telling and showing their audiences what is visually and experientially valuable in Big Sur through these citational practices, anthropologists are stating what knowledge is scholarly valuable, and all these citational decisions are operating within and reinforcing dominant metrics of value.

The sites vloggers chose to cite further serve to link them to the network of authentication of nature travel media from the 19th century. One evident similarity is between the characteristics of these common landmarks and those of American landscape paintings. For example, the most featured landmark in these vlogs, McWay Falls, is an 80-foot-tall waterfall that empties onto the beach during a low-tide, and the ocean during a high-tide. This waterfall is exemplary of the types of natural features that were objects of many paintings by the Hudson River School. Pfeiffer Beach, also commonly featured, is a beach enveloped by large cliffs and rocks, including a prominent one with a small hole[37] (Fig. 4), and is often highlighted as a place to watch the sun set on the ocean. Large cliffs and sunset scenes were other objects of great interest for landscape painters of the time. Therefore, featuring these

**Figure 4** Big Sur, Keyhole Arch by Ali Ertürk on www.deviantart.com

[37] This has become known as Keyhole Rock or Arch. For a short period in the winter, the sun lines up perfectly to shine through the hole in Keyhole Rock during sunset—an especially popular moment to photograph in this area.

landmarks not only places these vlogs within contemporary travel vlog genres, but also embeds them in the broader genealogy of American nature travel media.

Another characteristic of these vlogs that evokes 19th century nature travel media is the distance in vloggers' cinematographic choices in capturing these landmarks. All five vlogs featured McWay Falls using a distant, disembodied frame (Fig. 5). All except for The Planet D use a drone to shoot the waterfall. This distant view is partly due to limitations in the landscape; there is no way to access the beach where the waterfall resides. However, vloggers' use of a drone is notable in that it constructs a view from nowhere; one that is necessarily outside of the body of the vlogger. While the drones allow for a closer view of the waterfall than what is humanly possible, they also erase the footsteps behind the lack of point of view of the observer, making it seem as though what is being observed is a neutral view of the landscape rather than one that the vlogger carefully crafted and curated using expensive machinery. This disembodiment evokes a distance to the land that is heavily present in Transcendentalist writing

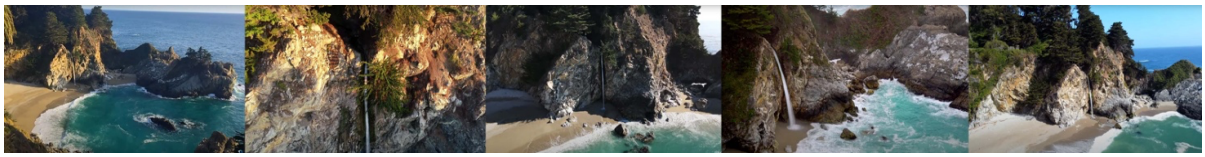

**Figure 5** Screenshots of McWay Falls featured in vlogs
from left to right: The Planet D; Erik Conover; The Other Side; Life is Good Travel; Crosby Grace Travels

and American landscape paintings, and one that is necessary for the land to be constructed as a 'wilderness' or a recreational natural area to visit—foregrounding the distant gaze as the only embodied state for visitors engaging with the land. This way of framing the land allows vloggers to position themselves once again within the network of authentication of 19th century nature travel media, authorizing them as expert speakers of the land through their citational practices.

California State Parks and U.S. National Forest Service

While Big Sur is not a National Park, some of the area designated as Big Sur is considered a part of Los Padres National Forest. There are also ten state parks within the region, the most central one being Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. California State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service gain authority through branching off of the network of authentication of recreational environmentalism. The language in these information boards construct their position in this citational network by repeatedly mentioning preservation efforts in the interest of public recreation.


**Figure 6** A Partnership Between California State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service, taken by me at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, June 2021

The information board below, written and designed by people working in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, explicitly invokes recreational environmentalist sentiments (Fig. 6):

> Although you are visiting Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, you are currently standing in the Los Padres National Forest (1). These two organizations work together to protect and preserve our natural and cultural resources so people can visit and enjoy these beautiful areas (2).
>
> The National Forest System was created in 1905 and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park in 1933 (3). A formal partnership between State Parks and U.S. Forest Service was established in 1987 with the creation of the multi-agency facility in Big Sur (4). The facility now in use was completed in 1992, and also includes the California Highway Patrol (5).
>
> You are presently standing on Forest Service land (6). The park boundary is approximately 520 feet back up the trail (7). Because the forest and the park are adjacent, they become one in the eyes of the visitor (8). The common goal is

> protection of the prime resources in the area—the mighty coast redwoods and the Big Sur River (9).

The preservation sentiment is directly stated in (2) with "work together to protect and *preserve* our natural and cultural resources," and is followed by qualifying the preservation for people to "visit and enjoy these beautiful areas." This sentence legitimizes California State Parks and the U.S. National Forest Service as the assumed stewards tasked with preserving the land and distances the imagined public by designating them as those who can only use the space recreationally—as opposed to the state and federal organizations that are doing the "work" of preservation. The constructed dynamic between visitor and steward renders the state entities as expert speakers for and caretakers of the land. A similar distance is created in (8): "...they become one in the eyes of the visitor." Once again, the "visitor" belongs to an imagined public that will only interact with the land recreationally. In addition to authorizing state entities, these statements also assume state ownership of the land by creating an imagined public that could not include Indigenous caretakers of the land.

Following this sentence is another statement of the state's preservation work (9). By highlighting that what is being protected is "prime resources," in the interest of public recreation, there a distinction being created between public and private interests—where public interests are preservation, and private interests are resource exploitation. Firstly, this creates a framework within which redwoods and the Big Sur River can either be preserved or extracted, not leaving any space for other ways of interacting with the land. Secondly, this allows for the governing organizations to position themselves as altruistic actors, working in the interest of the imagined public's wellbeing through recreational access to "natural and cultural resources." Therefore, by relying on the hegemonic ideological basis of recreational environmentalism—that 'wilderness' should be preserved because it is a valuable cultural asset for the enjoyment of 'the American

public'—California State Parks and the National Forest Service are being rendered as altruistic protectors to be entrusted with this role by the public[38].

A final key element of authorization is tied directly to the imagined role of California State Parks and U.S. Forest Service within the ideology of nation-states. Nation-states necessitate ownership of land, naturalizing state authority over land designated as the United States at large, but especially lands that are explicitly designated as federally or state preserved areas. Inherently, the ideological state is, by definition, in an altruistic and authoritative role. The language in the information board creates a context in which this is unable to be contested. For example, (6) is stating the Forest Service's ownership of the land as a factual, unquestionable characteristic of the land. Further, the unqualified use of "The common goal" in (9) assumes a goal that is not only common amongst the two organizations, but one that is in the interest of a broader American public, naturalizing the state's altruistic characterization without leaving space to question whether or not other modes of land use and land relations might serve some publics better.

## The Esalen Institute

As a private organization that has served as a central place for the Human-Potential Movement, the Esalen Institute has a markedly different history of land use to that of the state and of travel vloggers. The institute was founded on land that was owned by 165 acres of ocean-front land owned by the family of one of the co-founders, Michael Murphy. This land was initially homesteaded by Thomas Benton Slate in 1882 (Bureau of Land Management 1882), who had come to Big Sur for its mineral springs to attempt to cure his arthritis (Kripal 2007, 91). He developed the springs to be used by tourists, leading them to be referred to as "Slate's Hot

[38] The word "protector" is also important in its iconized relationship with police, considering that the text mentions the shared facility between the Forest Service and California Highway Patrol.

Springs" until the Esalen Institute was established in 1962 (CoastView 2020). Slate then sold it to the Little family, who eventually sold it to Michael Murphy's grandfather, Henry Murphy, in 1910 (Kripal 2007, 92). Henry Murphy, who was a doctor, wanted to build a "European style health spa" on this land, further setting the tone for how it would be used in the future.

The Esselen peoples had actively used the land and hot springs for thousands of years[39]. The institute today rests near, and possibly on, Esselen burial grounds[40], and for many decades, there were no regulations on how artifacts and dug-up human remains were treated (Kripal 2007; Abraham 2014). These circumstances have caused tensions and criticisms of the organization[41], especially by OCEN (Abraham 2014). While the institute does little to publicly acknowledge this history today, as is evident by its name[42], the Esalen Institute and Murphy family have long used the brand of 'the Native' to cultivate their own brand of a place for holistic healing. In fact, even the finding of Esselen skeletons contributed to Michael Murphy's vision for the institute; building off of his grandfather's observation of the site's uniqueness for being the "meeting of three kinds of waters," mineral water, saltwater, and freshwater, Murphy believed that the Esselen's burials of their deceased further indicated that the place had a special power (Kripal 2007, 80). Naming the institute after the Esselen was suggested to Murphy by a well-known local figure, but Murphy was already familiar with this name throughout his childhood—for example, the Murphy family cow was named Essie. Therefore, there was a felt familial lineage

[39] Radiocarbon dating of artifacts on the site of the Esalen Institute date back to 2,500-5,500 years ago (Kripal 2007; Abraham 2014). However, other settlements along the coast of Monterey County date to 13,400 years old (Kripal 2007, 78).
[40] There are many reports of human bones being found on the Esalen site (Kripal 2007; Abraham 2014). Kripal does not cite his evidence, but goes as far as suggesting that fifty skeletons have been discovered over the years, giving very specific information about exactly where they were discovered and that they were "always buried in fetal position and looking toward the sea," (Kripal 2007, 80).
[41] Refer to footnote 12 on pages 5 & 6.
[42] Co-founders Richard Price and Michael Murphy decided to name the institute after the Esselen tribe upon a suggestion by a well-known local in Big Sur named Harry Dick Ross, but adaptations of "Esselen" were familiar to Murphy as their family milk cow was named "Essie," (Kripal 2007, 80).

of comfort in Murphy's claim to the name of the original inhabitants and caretakers of the land the institute was built on, land that the Esselen have not had access to for hundreds of years.

One way in which the Esalen Institute's speakers are authorized as experts is by relying on the network of authentication granted by the Murphy family's long history of 'ownership' of the land on which the organization was established[43]. At the core of this network is the hegemonic ideology of land ownership itself—as a result of settler colonial logics, ownership is normalized as the primary relationship someone can have with land, and the notion of property ownership has historically been one of the most significant tools for maintaining racial and socioeconomic divisions. Given this, the institute's positioning in a history of land ownership evokes authority by relying on the assumed valorization of property ownership within the regime of racial capitalism.

The Esalen's reliance on land ownership for authorizing their speakers is further evident in the language they use in their "About" page. However, ownership is not acting alone here; it works in tandem with a disembodied voice that narrates Big Sur's history, and an evocation of early Transcendentalist writings about nature. The text on the page reads as follows:

> "There's the wonder of the place itself, 120 acres of fertile land perched between mountain and ocean, with hot mineral springs gushing out of a seaside cliff. The delicate Big Sur air of a late May afternoon, the midnight mist of July, the drenching February rain. There are October nights so clear the Milky Way lights your walk along the darkened garden path. And always, the sound of the sea, reminding you you're one part of something much bigger.
>
> And then there are the people — the people who live there and love the land. The philosophers and sociologists and theologians and psychologists and artists and dancers and writers who each have something unique to teach us about what it means to be

[43] While this is not directly mentioned on the home page or "About" page, Kripal's book, which I cite frequently above, as well as countless websites about the institute (many including interviews), mention Murphy's family's ownership of the land as a hallmark of the organization's history (e.g., Morris 1995; Callahan 2012). The Kripal book's recounting of this history is important to note here, because the Esalen website links his book as an opportunity to learn more about the organization.

> human. And the 750,000 more who have come from all over the world for the inspiration, intellectual freedom, and opportunity to explore the deepest self as part of a community of seekers.
>
> They come to meditate, they come to dance, they come to connect. To create, to question, to reflect. To find clarity. And they leave changed, and ready to change the world."

This text sits in isolation on the website, in a gray box of its own, and it is the first piece of text in the "About" page. The narrator is impossible to spot. Instead, the descriptions of the land and history of Big Sur are rendered as neutral and factual accounts, told by a 'voice from nowhere'. By indexing factuality and distancing the author of this text from the narrative they wrote, the speaker for Esalen is placed as a distanced observer of the land across time, invoking a similar affective relationship with the land as that of the vloggers' drone shots, the imagined public in the information boards, and artists and observers of 19th century landscape paintings.

The text further evokes the voices and visions of figureheads of Transcendentalism and the Hudson River School with noting how global travelers come to the institute for "inspiration" and "intellectual freedom," reminiscent of Transcendentalism's controversial departure from Christianity and turn toward a form of 'spirituality' derived from Transcendentalist figures' observations of 'Eastern religion'. These evocations demonstrate a philosophical genealogy that ties Esalen and its Human-Potential Movement to the Transcendentalist movement. Esalen is, therefore, constructing its position within the network of authentication of this genealogy, authorizing the Institute's prominent figures as speakers for the land.

The Transcendentalist voice is indexed by the phrase "the wonder of the place itself," capturing an all too familiar emotional response to "untouched wilderness" as was present in American landscape paintings of the 19th century and narratives of wilderness of the time. These narratives remain in the picture as the text continues by highlighting key features of the

landscape—the mountain, the ocean, the *gushing* springs, the cliff, natural features that tightly align with those that were most frequently depicted in American landscape paintings and written about by writers such as Muir and Thoreau, and that are reminiscent of those featured by contemporary Big Sur travel vlogs. By placing the organization within the citational networks of Transcendentalism, Esalen's text authorizes the Institute as a place where one can visit in order to experience a 'true', 'pristine', awe-inspiring 'wilderness.'

## Wilderness for the White and Wealthy

"*Thank God for the drone because that's like the best way to capture this beauty for sure, really hard otherwise*" - The Other Side

"Ideally you can come for a few days because it is incredible," says Crosby of the Crosby Grace Travels vlog, "a massive area of untouched land and there's so many things to do, so much to see, so much to hike." While it might not always be stated explicitly, Big Sur is often branded within a framework of 'exploration'. This framework is invoked in vlogs' use of drone footage (Fig. 5) and landscape shots depicting the land without the vlogger or other human beings; without a trace of humans in front of or behind the gaze, the natural landscape is made to look 'untouched', in other words, unexplored and yet-to-be-discovered, and the viewer is positioned to vicariously 'explore' the land through the disembodied frames. Vloggers also commonly highlight Big Sur's 'untouched' qualities discursively, such as Crosby's comment from above:

### Transcript 3

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Crosby; | i:DEAlly you can come (.) for a few days? |
| 2 | because (1) it (.) is (.) |
| 2 | inCREdible? (.) |
| 3 | a MAssive area of untouched land. |
| 4 | and (.) there's SO many things <fast> to do |
| 5 | so much to see? so much to hike </fast> |

A similar sentiment is seen in Erik Conover's vlog:

**Transcript 4**

| | |
|---|---|
| 11 Erik; | Big Sur? (.) has been called (.) |
| 12 | the longest? (.) and MOST SCEnic. stretch (.) |
| 13 | of undeveloped coastline? (.) |
| 14 | in the United States. |

Like Crosby's use of "untouched," Erik's use of "undeveloped" in line 13 constructs Big Sur as a space that has not been industrialized. We already know that these characterizations are untrue given the thousands of years of Indigenous inhabitance of the region, Big Sur's long industrial history, and the fact that a highway runs through it, which is one of the primary infrastructures that can be found on "developed" land. In this case, the language of "untouched" and "undeveloped" is not describing the materiality of the land, but it is doing the work of invoking nationalist wilderness ideologies by illustrating a 'pristine wilderness' akin to American landscape paintings. Further, by qualifying "undeveloped land" with "longest" and "most scenic in the country", Erik is indexing that Big Sur has a rare group of characteristics. Crosby's use of "massive" in line 3 does a similar job of indexing rarity—a quality that is iconized with value. Crosby's emphasis of "massive" is also reminiscent of rhetoric used during industrialization to describe natural areas that were ripe for *exploring* in the interest of *exploiting* resources such as timber and limestone. By invoking historic objectifications of land that valorized natural areas and resources to serve the interests of specific publics, these vloggers' language renders "the Big Sur experience" an object that is of value, and therefore desirable.

The notion of exploration also arises in the Esalen Institute's text, but unlike the vlogs' notions of exploring land, it is noted as an ideological grounding of the Human-Potential Movement: "exploring the deepest self as part of a community of seekers." While they explicitly

contextualize the act of exploring as an act contained in the self, the text constructs Big Sur as the material space where one can find the "community of seekers" to explore with, branding Big Sur as a place to travel to for this experience, and therefore, as a place to explore in itself—an object of (colonial) curiosity and desire. Ultimately, these citations of 'exploration' across discourses brand Big Sur within a colonial framework that allows for a single way for visitors to interact with the land; one that is distant, alienated from the positionality of the explorer.

This is a common thread amongst the way "the Big Sur experience" is being branded across both the Esalen Institute text and vlogs. The Esalen website (and the Human-Potential Movement at large) is concerned with selling an experience that is mutually accessible to all persons, where all types of people can travel to this space and feel safe enough to embark on a spiritual journey within, in the presence of strangers. However, as I explain later, the material realities of traveling to Big Sur already render it financially inaccessible to a large public. Further, Esalen's two-day workshops range from over five hundred to thousands of dollars, renting a "sleeping bag space" at the institute for two nights costs five hundred and thirty dollars, and renting a single room for that length of time costs over a thousand dollars. This material inaccessibility is coupled with the fact that there is no explicit mention of the different ways that non-white people might experience embodying the space of Esalen, and Big Sur at large, including challenges they might experience in their travels, or discomfort they might experience in a predominantly white spiritual space created by an organization with predominantly white patrons and donors. In their overt lack of acknowledgement of different embodied experiences different people may have in their space, the language used by Esalen universalizes white and wealthy embodiments of the institute and Big Sur, ensuring that whiteness and wealth are unmarked.

Through the naturalization of an 'exploration' oriented framework, the experience of 'exploring' Big Sur itself becomes objectified by being positioned within citational networks of 'exploration', allowing it to acquire a meaning that is then able to be circulated; the experience of 'exploring' Big Sur—"the Big Sur experience"—becomes an object that signifies things. This raises two questions: what does this Big Sur come to signify through these objectifications, and who is able to acquire this object? To answer these, I will first look at the issue of the embodied, material inaccessibility of traveling to Big Sur, and then I will discuss how whiteness and wealth become invisibly inscribed into "the Big Sur experience," limiting the ability of some viewers of these vlogs to align with the objectifications that vloggers perform.

Exploration was never an act that was valorized independently, but it was necessarily tied to the end goals of gaining more wealth—more power—and bringing legibility to your wealth. This entails that the act of exploration is not mutually accessible. One of the most significant parameters that influences the ability of different people to *do* exploration is financial accessibility. In the context of Big Sur, this is certainly a factor in whether one is able to visit the area. For one, lodging prices in Big Sur rarely go below two-hundred dollars for one night, and can go up to thousands of dollars a night. Campgrounds are cheaper, but they typically require booking months ahead of time, rendering them inaccessible for anyone who has an unstable financial situation and is not able to plan a trip months in advance. "Primitive campgrounds," or those that do not have any amenities, require one to have sufficient hiking and camping gear that will allow them to hike for miles before reaching the campground, which typically costs hundreds of dollars[44]. In terms of accessing the area in the first place, there is no public transportation that goes to Big Sur. The area is accessed through the winding, single-lane

[44] Of course the ability to withstand carrying heavy camping gear through these distances also makes "primitive camping" spots inaccessible to people with disabilities.

Highway 1, and the nearest reasonably sized city is 40 miles away in most directions (especially from the central area including Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, the post-office, and the majority of the lodging), therefore one would ideally have a car that can withstand long distances and is at a low risk of being broken down. There is a single gas station within a large radius, and it is very expensive (near six dollars per gallon in August of 2021). Finally, all restaurants in the area are quite expensive, and there are no grocery stores within a large radius except for the Big Sur Deli, which is also on the higher end of the price range and has a limited selection of foods. So, a weekend trip, possibly even a day trip, to Big Sur for a single person traveling from a nearby city can easily cost hundreds of dollars, rendering it financially inaccessible to many people.

Some vloggers acknowledge aspects of the experience of visiting Big Sur. For example, on The Other Side, a van life channel run by a couple, Ana and Ian show a frame of the gas station in Big Sur to discuss how expensive it is[45]. Similarly, when stopping for gas in the vlog by Crosby Grace Travels, Crosby's partner Dylan exclaims, "I gotta' like give them an artery or something, like, it's six dollars for regular!" Other than discussing gas prices, none of the vlogs make mention of the overall cost of their trip or specific expenses. This allows for the financial inaccessibility element of "the Big Sur experience" to go unmarked. The embodied inaccessibility of Big Sur plays a large role in limiting what types of people are able to travel there, but it doesn't offer us a complete picture of the inaccessibility of "the Big Sur experience." For this, we must consider how travel and exploration came to signify wealth.

In her essay titled "1492: A New World View," Sylvia Wynter explains and theorizes the ontological groundings of discovery and exploration in detail, suggesting that these notions were

[45] In other videos on their channel, they also discuss challenges they have had with the "van life" lifestyle, including its various expenses. However, in one of those videos, they also reveal that, like most van life influencers, they have a secondary home that they return to when they are done traveling. The illusion of accessibility of van life is a topic of its own that I do not have space to go into here but hope to analyze in future research.

normalized and valorized through colonizers' subjective perceptual framework of the world—one that was both a result of, and justified, the goal of European expansion in the interest of spreading Christianity to the rest of the world before the fast-approaching Second Coming of Christ (Wynter 1995). Wynter notes that one of the motivating factors for Columbus to carry out his voyage—despite the intellectual agreement at the time of the incredibility of finding land West of Europe—was that the Spanish monarchy rewarded people who "discovered and expatriated" land (a land grant of sorts). Therefore, the desire to explore was generated as a result of the goal of discovery in the interest of gaining power.

European obsession with exploration and discovery manifested in different ways. For example, with the rise of mercantilism in the 16th and 17th centuries, overseas exploration of "unknown curiosities" was gaining interest. One of the ways in which this materialized was through cabinets of curiosities, which were rooms or display cabinets owned by the merchant class and early 'naturalists' that displayed a collection of "curious" objects from different parts of the world, including Europe[46]. They included all sorts of things, ranging from cultural materials such as Chinese porcelain to geological materials like gemstones to preserved bodies of "exotic" animals from overseas. Often placed centrally in the living room, these cabinets displayed the owner's wealth by indexing their well-traveled and knowledgeable status. Therefore, these collections were material manifestations of the iconization of exploration and wealth.

Cabinets of curiosities make evident that making one's wealth legible plays a role in motivating the act of exploration. This goal did not just manifest the cabinets; some merchants who became well-known for their collections of animals and plants would hire artists to illustrate the different organisms in their collection, creating archives of their wealth that would survive

[46] These cabinets are considered precursors to museums and naturalist archives such as herbariums.

much longer than the cabinets themselves. The YouTube pages of travel vloggers serve a similar purpose as these illustrated archives; I propose that travel vlogger channels essentially act as virtual cabinets of curiosities, allowing for vloggers to display their curated collection of experiences of places around the world as materialized in each vlog. This orientation toward displaying the experience is inherent in the act of producing a vlog, but it also influences the vloggers' embodied experiences in Big Sur, affecting their own objectification of Big Sur:

**Transcript 5**

| | |
|---|---|
| 21 Ian; | McWay Falls is (.) the (.) most |
| 22 | <fast> popular stop on this </fast> |
| 23 | Big (.) Sur (.) roadtrip (.) and this highway |
| 24 | bu:t? (.) <fast> you only need five minutes here </fast> |
| 25 | just to take some photo:s |
| 26 | take in the vie:ws |

Here, Ian from The Other Side is introducing the first stop on the Big Sur portion of their trip, McWay Falls. He first emphasizes the popularity of McWay Falls with the pauses in line 1 between "the" and "most," establishing it as a place that a visitor of Big Sur should stop at. Then, he explains how a visitor should visit this place. As he says lines 5 and 6, the frame shows a near-birds-eye-view frame of the waterfall and ocean filmed by their drone. By fronting taking photos, Ian proposes prioritizing the embodied experience of observing the area through a camera, orienting the visitor toward the goal of documenting their experience. With his elongation of the words "photos" and "views," he directs visitors toward a singular embodied stance of a distant gaze and toward valuing the land for solely its views, eliminating possibilities of different relationships with the land. His use of the word "need" in line 4 indicates that there is an ultimate reason for the visitor to be there, further reinforcing the documentation of the experience of being there as a necessity and justifying for a presence that continues to ignore

Indigenous claims to the land. We see a similar sentiment in a later comment by Ana in the same vlog:

**Transcript 6**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 27 | Ana; | thank god for the drone. (.) |
| 28 | | cause that's like the BEST wa:y? to capture this beauty for sure. |
| 29 | | really hard otherwise @@@ |

Ana's statement assumes that "capturing the beauty" of the landscape is a primary goal of "the Big Sur experience," once again suggesting a specific orientation toward documentation for the visitor. She emphasizes that the drone is the "best" way to do this, and not only is it the best way, but she notes that it is "really hard" to do so without the drone. Like the artists hired to illustrate one's cabinet of curiosities, the expensive tool of a drone is, then, required to properly document one's experience of Big Sur. This creates a frame in which certain documentations of the land are more valid and true-to-reality than others. Considering that most of the sixty-one thousand viewers of this vlog will not have access to a drone, this framing objectifies "the Big Sur experience" as less accessible to those without the ideal tools of documentation.

The reliance on 'ideal' tools to materialize one's collection reveals an interesting characteristic of the wealth indexed by cabinets of curiosities and travel vlog channels. Pre-modern European collectors were not just indexing material wealth through their ability to acquire the objects in their collections, but they were making evident an experiential wealth that was tied to exploration and discovery, as well as *knowledge*—knowledge of 'foreign' things, ecosystems, peoples, and so on. Experiential wealth is a specific narrative of experience that accompanies material wealth but is just as necessary and valuable as the materiality of one's wealth. Unlike cabinets of curiosities, travel vlog channels do not overtly index material wealth; this would likely be detrimental to their image since relatability to their audience is an important

factor in vloggers' success. However, they do overtly index experiential wealth. Vloggers do not come to be intelligible as experts simply because they are traveling to these places, but because they have the *experience* and *knowledge* to be able to travel in the "ultimate" way, and to be able to materialize that experience with minimal citational gaps. Through the constant emphasis on the beauty and vloggers' enjoyment of their travel experiences, this experiential wealth is generically constructed to be extremely valuable and desirable. The entanglement of material and experiential wealth coupled with the invisibility of vloggers' material wealth objectifies not just "the Big Sur experience," but the very desirable travel vlogger lifestyle as one that is mutually accessible.

Just as travel vloggers brand "the Big Sur experience" as financially mutually accessible; they also render it as racially mutually accessible in similar ways to the Esalen Institute's text. While the great majority of travel vloggers are white, the creators that I included in this study displayed no reflexivity on their racial positionality and how it has enabled their travels. Furthermore, they also make no mention of how differently-racialized persons might experience the space differently. For example, traveling and sleeping in a van parked in public spaces offers a very different embodiment and carries much larger risks for a Black visitor of Big Sur than a white visitor. Traveling through Big Sur as an Indigenous person with an ancestral connection with the land produces a much different embodiment of the space than the "ultimate" ways in which one is meant to experience Big Sur according to these vlogs. Even perceiving drones as positively valent (as Ana does in line 7 of transcript 5) is a relationship with that object that is only available for certain persons. The lack of acknowledgment of different possible positionalities and lack of reflexivity on vloggers' own racial and class positionalities objectifies "the Big Sur experience" as alienated from vloggers' whiteness and wealth. Therefore, whiteness

and wealth become *covertly* signified, limiting the types of people that are able to acquire "the Big Sur experience" under the guise of universal accessibility.

## Citational Gaps in Vloggers' Metaconsumption of "the Big Sur experience"

Materialized in YouTube vlogs, these objectifications of Big Sur circulate far and wide to global audiences (Fig. 7). The viewership numbers of the five vlogs I analyzed range from twenty-seven thousand to nearly three-hundred and forty-eight thousand. Vlogger subscriptions range from around one thousand to nearly two million. It is fair to say the circulation of these objectifications influences visitors' experiences of Big Sur. Following Shankar's conceptualization of "metaconsumption" as the circulation and consumption of objectifications (Shankar 2008, 92), I propose that these vlogs offer a metaconsumption of Big Sur. Shankar suggests that just as individuals associate themselves with objects as a means of defining their social status, they also associate themselves with objectifications toward similar means. Additionally, on the social life of brands, Nakassis writes that "brands offer themselves up to us as tools for self-actualization and, thus, as the very context of sociality and community," (Nakassis 2012, 629). Given the role of associating/disassociating

| Name | Date Posted | Creator Name | Subscribers | Views | Likes | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| California Road Trip TRAVEL GUIDE \| BIG SUR | 11.11.2018 | Erik Conover | 1.92 M | 347,817 | 4800 | 252 |
| Big Sur & Beyond - 5 Days on the California Coast | 02.23.2021 | The Other Side | 117 K | 61,394 | 1400 | 176 |
| BIG SUR CALIFORNIA (Things To Do & One Day Travel Guide) | 10.08.2020 | Life is Good Travel | 4.76 K | 40,571 | 1000 | 137 |
| 5 THINGS TO DO IN BIG SUR (one day travel guide) | 06.14.2021 | Crosby Grace Travels | 8.01 K | 27,524 | 769 | 66 |
| California Road Trip - Monterey to Big Sur and Carmel by the Sea \| The Planet D | 03.14.2021 | The Planet D | 51.7 K | 42,494 | 457 | 36 |
| Big Sur from Carmel by the Sea to Monterey California \| 17 Mile Drive | 10.01.2020 | Tommy Insane | 1.09 K | 76,788 | 1600 | 282 |

**Figure 7** Statistics of the vlogs used in this project

with brands—objectifications—in peoples' and communities' constructions of their identities, how do objectifications become available to specific types of people, and what are some mechanisms to contest these?

Vloggers have a unique role in this circulation process; as a necessary condition for their ability to reproduce generic expectations, they are simultaneously consumers and producers of these objectifications. In other words, the process of producing a travel vlog of Big Sur is, in itself, an act of alignment or dealignment with respect to different generic characteristics of Big Sur travel vlogs. This creates a condition where vloggers are able to produce powerful contestations of dominant narratives about visiting Big Sur, just as they are able to strongly reinforce these narratives. One vlogger who creates an alternative visitor experience of Big Sur is Tommy Insane[47]. Although he does not diverge from every element of vlogs I discussed above, there are notable ways in which he creates citational gaps in the dominant narratives of "the Big Sur experience."

Tommy is an Asian American[48] man who produces travel vlogs within California exclusively. While he has less subscribers than the other vloggers I researched, his vlog on Big Sur has nearly seventy-seven thousand views, making it the video with the second-most views in my group[49]. Tommy was the first non-white vlogger whose Big Sur video I came across at the beginning of my research. Despite the dominance of white vloggers in the travel vlog genre broadly, the second-most prominent racial identity present among Big Sur travel vloggers specifically is Asian American. Still, Tommy's positionality as Asian American offers an

[47] I am not suggesting that he is intentionally producing his vlogs to contest generic expectations, but rather I am referring to the effect that his style of vlogging generates.
[48]Although I am using "Asian American," I acknowledge that this label does not sufficiently represent all diasporic Asian communities in the U.S., such as South and Southeast Asian communities.
[49] Tommy Insane has two vlogs on Big Sur. I chose to focus on this one because it has a notably higher viewership than the other. However, the characteristics I analyze here are present in both videos.

inherent contestation to the whiteness of the travel vlogger genre at large. What makes his vlog notably different from the others, however, is not just his racial identity, but how he portrays his experience in Big Sur (perhaps partly because of his positionality). While I will focus on these differences for the rest of this section, it's important to note that, like the white vloggers, Tommy also does not discuss issues of material (including financial) accessibility in his vlog.

Firstly, Tommy does not present his vlog as a "guide" on how one should visit Big Sur, but rather a trip that the viewer can take with him through his experience of the area:

**Transcript 7**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Tommy; | toda:y? (.) we're gonna' be exploring (.) |
| 2 | Monterey? (.) California (1) |
| 3 | buT (.) we're gonna' be starting off (.) in. Carmel? (1) |
| 4 | beca:use (1) Carmel? is a re:ally interesting? spot. (1) |
| 5 | <fast> to explore </fast> because they have (.) |
| 6 | a:rtwork? (.) they ha:ve (.) mom and pop restaurants (1) |

Given that he is traveling alone, in line 1, Tommy uses "we're" to refer to himself and the audience for this vlog. This invites viewers to watch the video with the intention of sharing this experience with him (virtually and not in real-time) rather than as an "ultimate guide" on how they *should* experience Big Sur. While the word "exploring" (line 1 & 5) is reminiscent of the theme of exploration in the other vlogs, Tommy proceeds by explaining that the exploration will begin with seeing local artwork and visiting mom and pop restaurants, which does not index the same colonial imagery of 'exploring pristine wilderness' as other vlogs' use of exploration narratives did.


**Figure 8** A frame from Tommy Insane's Big Sur vlog depicting him filming himself as he reaches out to the ocean.

A second notable citational gap in Tommy's vlog is his centering of his embodied experiences. Tommy holds his camera to film himself for most of the video (Fig. 8). At times, he places the camera at a distance and films himself walking in the shot, followed by an embodied frame, then a distant shot, then an embodied frame once again (Fig. 9)[50]. By fragmenting his distant shots and inserting embodied frames between the fragments, he consistently reminds viewers that they are watching *his* experience of the area. Not only does he center his embodied experience through his cinematographic choices, but he also discursively brings attention to sensorial experiences:


**Figure 9** Four frames from Tommy Insane's Big Sur vlog depicting him going back and forth between distant and embodied frames, proceeding from top to bottom.

**Transcript 8**

| | |
|---|---|
| 7 Tommy; | we can't come to the beach |
| 8 | without touching and |
| 9 | feeling the sand right? |
| 10 | alright (.) sand test (.) sand test? (.) |
| 11 | and we DEfinitely (.) can't? |
| 12 | go to the beach without getting close |
| 13 | to the water (.) |
| 14 | and heck. (1) |
| 15 | even touching it (.) right? (2) |
| 16 | look at that. (2) |
| 17 | how do you guys? like that. (.) |
| 18 | <slow> some Pacific Ocean water (2) |
| 19 | some California blue water (2) |
| 20 | icy cold? (1) buT (.) beautiful. </slow> |

[50] Another interesting element (as seen in Fig. 9) is that Tommy wears mask for certain shots in his vlog. While four out of the five other vlogs were during the COVID-19 pandemic, none of those vloggers wear masks while filming themselves.

What is most striking in this excerpt is Tommy's insistence on "touching" the sand and water, emphasizing an intimate sensorial interaction with the land—one that is not solely centered around vision—as opposed to other vloggers' orientation toward photographing and "capturing" the views from a distance (e.g., Transcript 5; Transcript 6).

Additionally, even though Tommy is the only ratified speaker, he creates a dialogic framework by consistently inviting the viewer to partake in the experience. For example, with the tag question "right" in lines 9 and 15, he invites the viewer to confirm his declarative statements in lines 7-9 and 11-15. He also invites the viewer to reflect on their reaction to the water (line 17). He follows this information by describing the water in a way that makes the qualities of the water familiar to a viewer who recognizes the connotations of "Pacific Ocean water" and "California blue water." This, perhaps, serves to make his sensorial experiences more relatable by indexing that anybody who has experienced touching the water of the Pacific Ocean would be able to imagine what he is experiencing in that moment. By characterizing the water as "California blue water" (line 19), he invokes an admiration in response to the quality of beauty iconized with California's landscape, reminiscent of some of the ways the other vloggers constructed the landscape. However, by bringing up the water's "icy cold" quality right afterward, Tommy grounds his construction of the California landscape in his embodied experience of it. By explicitly stating that it is "beautiful" in the same line, he also deconstructs his reliance on viewers' familiarity with "Pacific Ocean water" or "California blue water," and instead defines the properties of this kind of water—icy cold but beautiful—making the experience accessible to a broader audience and focusing on the characteristics of the water itself rather than the imaginaries of "California blue" and "Pacific Ocean water."

Through these citational gaps between his vlogs and other Big Sur travel vlogs, Tommy Insane broadens the possibility for viewers to align with his narrative of Big Sur. This expands the "the Big Sur experience" to include different types of people, and different ways of interacting with the land. However, like the other vloggers, Tommy also does not explicitly discuss his positionality and other characteristics of this type of trip, such as costliness; the citational gaps that are present between his vlog and the others provide an alternate narrative of Big Sur in some regards, but not all.

## California Natives & Esselen Peoples in Big Sur Narratives

"And then there are the people—the people who live there and love the land. The philosophers and sociologists and theologians and psychologists and artists and dancers and writers who each have something unique to teach us about what it means to be human," reads the Esalen Institute's website, telling a familiar story of Big Sur—its settler colonial, post-Mexican, white history. Historian and Indigenous Studies scholar Jean O'Brien (2010) terms this pattern "firsting," where local historical texts construct Anglo-American histories as the starting point of modernity, and Indigenous presence on the land as an introduction or "pre-occupancy," legitimizing settler's claims to the land. Adjacent to *firsting*, she theorizes "replacing" as narratives that make it seem as though European Americans had/have effectively *replaced* Indigenous peoples.

A prime example of the process of *firsting* and *replacing* can be found in an information board (Fig. 10) that sits at the entrance of the Big Sur Lodge[51]. On the information board, we see

[51] Big Sur Lodge is a popular establishment in the center of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. It includes a restaurant, lodging, and gift-store, and sits nearby the main trails in the state park.

a cross-section of a giant redwood log that is numbered with "events in human history" that correspond to the life of the tree. The first number corresponding to "human history" is 2, titled "1100 AD - Native Settlements."[52] The text on the left (on the rings of the tree) writes "rock art" alongside 2, while that on the right writes:

> "The Esselen were one of the Native American groups living in the Big Sur area during this time. They created unique handprints in caves as part of their rock art. They made tools with local resources including bone awls, antler flakers and projectile points."


**Figure 10** A Walk Through Time, taken by me at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, June 2021

This text is followed by 3, one of the first European explorers (Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo), 4, the establishment of Carmel Mission, 5, the California Gold Rush, 6, the forming of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, and 7, the moon landing. One of the most evocative elements of the text

[52] 1100 AD grossly underestimates how long-ago Natives settled in the area.

accompanying 2 is the writer's use of past-tense—"they created," "they made"—mapping Esselen presence on the land to a historic state of the area. This is reinforced by reducing Esselen land relations to "rock art" and the making of "tools using local resources," evoking an ancient, 'pre-modern' human community. Not only does this erase complex Esselen histories of the land, but it also disallows Esselen peoples' inhabitance of Big Sur at any time past this timestamp, including today, positioning them as prefatory to the region's 'modern human' (settler colonial) history.

The information board narrative is also doing *firsting* by illustrating a linear trajectory of human cultural evolution from 'primitive' to 'civilized'—a colonial ideology that undergirded anthropological thought for decades—and hence, permanently placing the Esselen in a 'pre-historic' position while centering materials and events tied to colonizers' history. This is most evident with the small text bubbles on the left side going from 2) rock art, to 3) printing press, to 5) telegraph, 6) telephone, and 7) internet; and from the final event on the right side being the moon landing—an arguably irrelevant event that relies on the reading of its iconicity with "human progress" broadly, and "American progress" more specifically. Lastly, the note on the bottom buttresses this sentiment by telling readers to "consider the time it has taken this forest to reach its *prime* [emphasis mine]," indexing that the moon landing and internet are exemplary of 'humanity in its prime'.

Once again, through *firsting* and *replacing*, these narratives construct Big Sur as a place where no Indigenous communities have been present for hundreds of years. Further, 2 ("1100 AD - Native Settlements") is followed with 3, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's 'exploration' and 'discovery' of California, and 4, the establishment of the Carmel Mission, but with no explicit mention of the relationship of the Esselen to these events. This progression and lack of

information makes it seem as though the Esselen disappeared for unknown reasons, and the Spanish, and then European Americans took the land that they had left vacant, erasing the historical violence of settler colonialism and its consequences for different communities to our day from the narrative of the land. Ultimately, this normalizes state ownership and California State Parks' role as the primary steward of the land, and leaves visitors uninformed of the ongoing struggle toward land sovereignty and state recognition by the Costanoan, Esselen, and Salinan communities.

This erasure is also perpetuated by the vlogs; none of the vloggers (including Tommy Insane) except for The Other Side say a single word about the Indigenous communities of the area. The Other Side give a very broad historical narrative as they stop in Santa Barbara[53]:

**Transcript 9**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Ana; | We are (.) at (.) Old Mission Santa Barbara |
| 2 | <fast> kind of an iconic stop </fast> (.) |
| 3 | here in Santa Barbara (.) |
| 4 | but here's some history behind it? |
| 5 | these missions are all over California |
| 6 | California used to be a Spanish co?lony. |
| 7 | Spaniards came in and actually tried to |
| 8 | force Native Americans to be CA?tholic and (.) |
| 9 | push their ideals on them |
| 10 | ultimately trying to make them (.) |
| 11 | Spanish citizens? |
| 12 | so it was (.) in some way (.) a form of slavery. |
| 13 | <fast> the his?tory behind it. </fast> |
| 14 | isn't the happiest sto:ry but (.) |
| 15 | that's kinda what history is nowada:ys |
| 16 | <fast> so as long as we learn from it (.) |
| 17 | don't repeat it (.) |
| 18 | try to be good people day to day </fast> |
| 19 | you know that's all you can do: |
| 20 | and now it's just a regular Catholic church? |

[53] While this is not a part of Big Sur, it is a stop on their trip because their vlog includes their travels from Los Angeles to Big Sur.

Ana tells a scripted historical narrative of Spanish and Native relations in California without specifying a specific Indigenous group, such as the Chumash who inhabited the area known as Santa Barbara. While she acknowledges that there was an effort of forced assimilation (lines 7-9), she keeps the narrative ambiguous, refraining from addressing the degree of violence endured by Natives. This ambiguity, for example, is achieved by line 12, where she mentions that it was "in some way a form of slavery," without directly stating that Natives across California were enslaved by Spaniards to perform labor for the missions. Additionally, in line 14 she says that this "isn't the happiest story," followed by "that's kinda what history is nowadays," greatly understating the consequences and dismissing the weight of colonial violence, effectively absolving any accountability for this violence.

Ana also places this narrative in the past by referring to it as "the history behind it [the church]" in line 4 and 13, and contextualizing it within a broader, 'universal history' in line 15. As a result, her narrative offers no space for the ongoing consequences of settler colonialism for Native populations. This effect is exacerbated by reducing the consequences of settler colonialism faced by Natives to Spanish missions and failing to acknowledge the role of American expansion and homesteading in the genocide and further displacement of Indigenous populations in California. The elimination of this information draws attention away from structural inequities faced by Native communities in California today. Further, she turns the lens on the individual in lines 16-19 by using the pronouns "we" (16) and "you" (19) when discussing how visitors should reconcile with this history. This neoliberal framework achieves a similar effect of absolving the state from its responsibility for the historical and ongoing consequences of its violence toward California Natives.

In addition to *firsting* and *replacing*, Jean O'Brien also theorizes "resisting" to highlight Indigenous communities' survival to counteract Euro-American narratives of extinction and display the ways in which texts fail to recognize Indigenous resistance. The excerpt above offers an example of ways in which Indigenous resistance and survival is rendered invisible. Ana's use of "we" and "you" assumes that visitors are not California Natives, or more broadly, have not been negatively affected by settler colonialism. Not only does this limit her audience, but it effectively renders California Natives as historic or pre-modern. Like the information boards and the Esalen Institute's text, vloggers also construct Big Sur as a place without any Indigenous inhabitants today; therefore, they fail to acknowledge the *resistance* and survival of Native communities and the Esselen to our day.

## Conclusion & Direction for Future Research

"It is with great honor that the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County has been called by the Ancestors to become stewards to a piece of our ancestral lands once again. On Friday July 24th, 2020, the Tribe became the official stewards of a piece of our ancestral homeland," reads the homepage of the ETMC's website. On July 24 of 2020, the ETMC made a deal with the Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) to become stewards of a nearly 1200-acre region in Big Sur known as the Adler Ranch. The purchase was made through a grant awarded by the California Natural Resources Agency with the support of the WRC. The WRC and ETMC share the goals of conserving the giant redwoods as a native ecosystem for the endangered California condor, and conserving the Little Sur River, which is spawning ground for the threatened South-Central California Steelhead. This land purchase, however, is significant in many other ways.

"Words cannot begin to describe the importance of these ancestral lands to our People. It is with great honor that we become stewards of these sacred indigenous lands once again. This land will allow us to protect our traditions and preserve the cultural heritage of the historic tribes of this region," continues the text on the ETMC's website. This is the first time Esselen peoples have regained the opportunity to steward their ancestral lands in 250 years. Despite being through a private purchase, this is a significant act of reclamation and a notable move toward land sovereignty—hence, by counteracting the hegemonic narrative of Esselen 'extinction', this is an exemplary event of *resistance*.

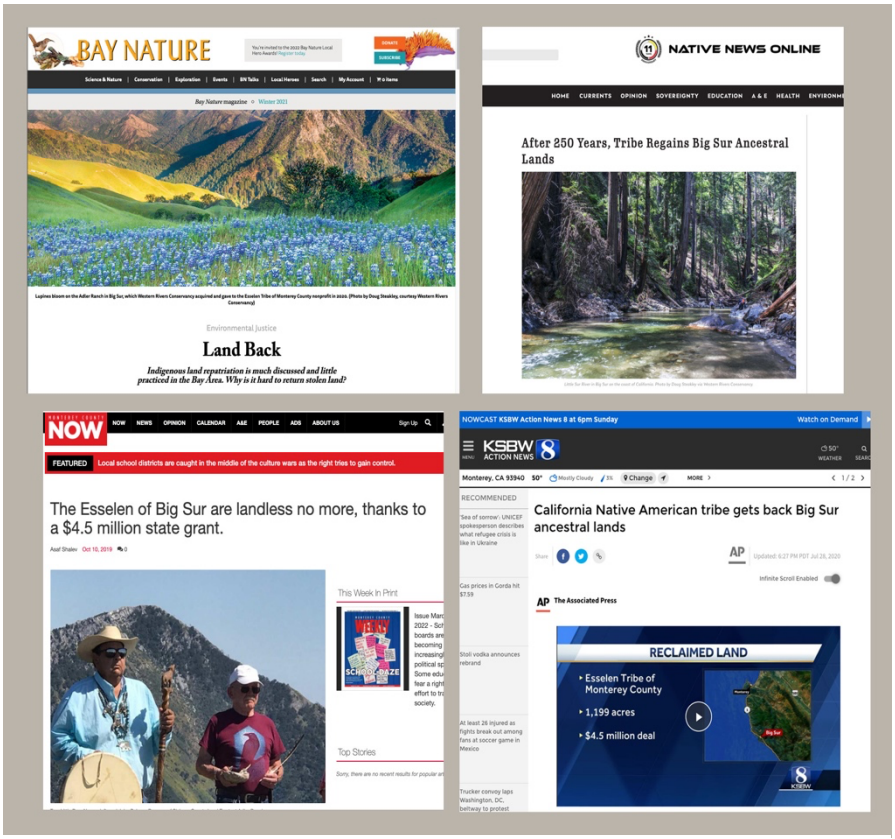


**Figure 11** Four screenshots of articles from local news media documenting the ETMC's land purchase. Bay Nature (top left); Native News Online (top right); Monterrey County NOW (bottom left); KSBW 8 News (bottom right).

Not only does this event inherently offer a counter-narrative, but it has also been widely broadcasted both on local (Fig. 11) and national (Fig. 12) news media. Four of the eight news articles gathered here note that the Esselen have been displaced from their lands for 250 years, and all others at least note the historic significance and sociopolitical context of this land-back event with words such as "returned," "regains," and "reclaims." By centering the present-day

Esselen community and explicitly addressing the history of their displacement, these articles create a citational gap in the dominant constructions of Big Sur, both historically, and today.

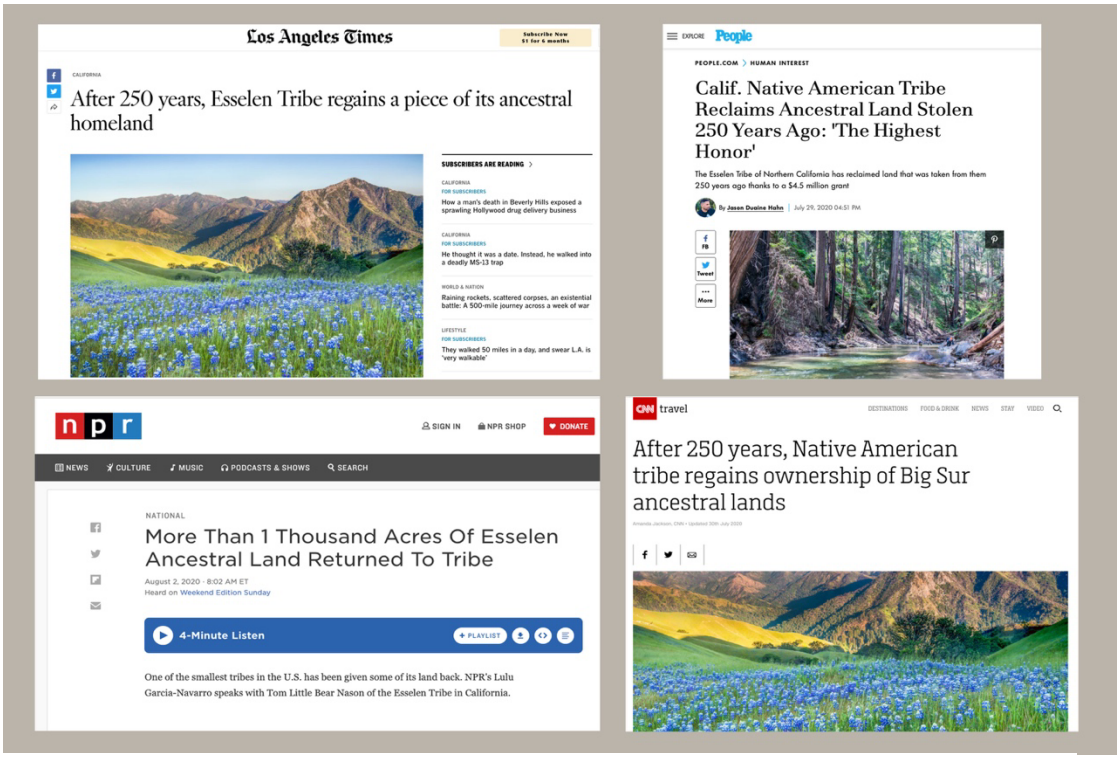


**Figure 12** Four screenshots of articles from national news media documenting the ETMC's land purchase. LA Times (top left); People Magazine (top right); NPR (bottom left); CNN travel (bottom right).

So far, my research has shown that across discourses of California State Parks information boards, travel vlogs, and the Esalen Institute, Big Sur is constructed as a 'wilderness' area iconic of an American cultural identity enmeshed in colonial land relations. The analyses produced in this paper shed light on how colonial ideologies, whiteness, and wealth are inscribed into natural places and the branding of lifestyles that give people endless access to these places. Through discursive practices, Big Sur is assigned semiotic relations that then get circulated, becoming recognizable by interpreters. These semiotic relations in turn affect how people

interact with Big Sur materially, therefore, limiting or allowing certain types of people to interact with the land in certain types of ways.

The citational mechanism through semiotic relations of things get circulated is a powerful means of sustaining hegemonic imaginaries of places and peoples. However, citational gaps will always be present in these regimentations, meaning there will always be opportunities for contestations of dominant narratives. Tracking these citational gaps allows us, as linguistic anthropologists, to identify sources that shift the semiotic relations of things. My future work will expand on this notion by bringing more attention to citational gaps and their role in generating semiotic relations of places that are different from those regimented in dominant discourses. This will contribute to linguistic anthropological research concerned with semiotic regimentation (e.g., Bauman 2000; Kroskrity 2009; Kelly-Holmes 2016), and the emerging field of semiotic placemaking (e.g., Banda & Jimaima 2015; Busse 2021; Papen 2015).

While in this thesis I have only addressed two examples constituting citational gaps, there are a multitude of people, communities, and organizations that are intentionally creating these gaps. For example, there are networks of Black naturalists on social media sharing their knowledge about foraging, food cultivation, caring for plants, birding, and much more (e.g., Alexis Nikole on TikTok[54]; #BlackBirdersWeek on various platforms). There are communities of Indigenous peoples working toward creating spaces and opportunities to share ancestral knowledge with one another, to reclaim knowledge, land, and food, and to celebrate their livelihoods together (e.g., POC Fungi Community[55]; Yaquis of Southern California[56]). There are organizations that form with the goal of creating opportunities for under-resourced communities

[54] https://www.tiktok.com/@alexisnikole?lang=en
[55] http://pocfungicommunity.com/
[56] http://yaquisocal.com/

to do outdoor recreation (e.g., Latinx Hikers[57]; Black People Who Hike[58]); communities that dominant discourses about outdoor recreation fail to acknowledge or recognize. Especially within the past decade, these discourses have been transforming rapidly thanks to the passion, care, and hard work of community organizers. In the future, I hope to make their resistance more central to my work by working with community organizers to produce knowledge in community, share knowledge with community, and reimagine futures together.

[57] https://www.latinxhikers.com/
[58] https://blackpeoplewhohike.com/

## Appendix

Texts

*A Partnership Between California State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service*

Although you are visiting Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, you are currently standing in the Los Padres National Forest (1). These two organizations work together to protect and preserve our natural and cultural resources so people can visit and enjoy these beautiful areas (2).

The National Forest System was created in 1905 and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park in 1933 (3). A formal partnership between State Parks and U.S. Forest Service was established in 1987 with the creation of the multi-agency facility in Big Sur (4). The facility now in use was completed in 1992, and also includes the California Highway Patrol (5).

You are presently standing on Forest Service land (6). The park boundary is approximately 520 feet back up the trail (7). Because the forest and the park are adjacent, they become one in the eyes of the visitor (8). The common goal is protection of the prime resources in the area—the mighty coast redwoods and the Big Sur River (9).

*Esalen Institute "About" Page*

"There's the wonder of the place itself, 120 acres of fertile land perched between mountain and ocean, with hot mineral springs gushing out of a seaside cliff. The delicate Big Sur air of a late May afternoon, the midnight mist of July, the drenching February rain. There are October nights so clear the Milky Way lights your walk along the darkened garden path. And always, the sound of the sea, reminding you you're one part of something much bigger.

And then there are the people — the people who live there and love the land. The philosophers and sociologists and theologians and psychologists and artists and dancers and writers who each have something unique to teach us about what it means to be human. And the 750,000 more who have come from all over the world for the inspiration, intellectual freedom, and opportunity to explore the deepest self as part of a community of seekers.

They come to meditate, they come to dance, they come to connect. To create, to question, to reflect. To find clarity. And they leave changed, and ready to change the world."

Transcripts

**Transcript 1:** Erik Conover, California Road Trip TRAVEL GUIDE | Big Sur, 0:31 - 0:45

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 Erik; | My mission (.) in this three-part video series (.) is simple (1) |
| 6 | show you. the? top destinations (.) TO experience (.) |
| 7 | on the ULtimate road-trip? |
| 8 | <fast> through the state </fast> (.) of CAlifornia. |
| 9 | starting here? (.) |
| 10 | in Big Sur. |

**Transcript 2**: Erik Conover, California Road Trip TRAVEL GUIDE | Big Sur, 0:21 - 0:31

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Erik: | I'm here in the? BEAU:tiful state of CAlifornia |
| 2 | in partnership (.) with Visit California. |
| 3 | on a two-week? long road-trip (.) with my. good friend (.) |
| 4 | Mike Shepherd. |
| 5 Mike: | {plays guitar} |

**Transcript 3:** Crosby Grace Travels - 5 THINGS TO DO IN BIG SUR (one day travel guide), 0:55 - 0:58

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Crosby; | i:DEAlly you can come (.) for a few days? |
| 2 | because (1) it (.) is (.) |
| 2 | inCREdible? (.) |
| 3 | a MAssive area of untouched land. |
| 4 | and (.) there's SO many things <fast> to do |
| 5 | so much to see? so much to hike </fast> |

**Transcript 4:** Erik Conover, California Road Trip TRAVEL GUIDE | Big Sur, 0:47 - 0:53

| | |
|---|---|
| 11 Erik; | Big Sur? (.) has been called (.) |
| 12 | the longest? (.) and MOST SCEnic. stretch (.) |
| 13 | of undeveloped coastline? (.) |
| 14 | in the United States. |

**Transcript 5:** The Other Side, Big Sur & Beyond - 5 Days on the California Coast, 12:07 - 12:14

| | |
|---|---|
| 21 Ian; | McWay Falls is (.) the (.) most |
| 22 | <fast> popular stop on this </fast> |
| 23 | Big (.) Sur (.) roadtrip (.) and this highway |
| 24 | bu:t? (.) <fast> you only need five minutes here </fast> |
| 25 | just to take some photo:s |
| 26 | take in the vie:ws |

**Transcript 6:** The Other Side, Big Sur & Beyond - 5 Days on the California Coast, 14:14 - 14:19

| | |
|---|---|
| 27 Ana; | thank god for the drone. (.) |
| 28 | cause that's like the BEST wa:y? to capture this beauty for sure. |
| 29 | really hard otherwise @@@ |

**Transcript 7:** Tommy Insane, Big Sur from Carmel by the Sea to Monterey California | 17 Mile Drive, 0:00 - 0:20

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Tommy; | toda:y? (.) we're gonna' be exploring (.) |
| 2 | Monterey? (.) California (1) |
| 3 | buT (.) we're gonna' be starting off (.) in. Carmel? (1) |
| 4 | beca:use (1) Carmel? is a re:ally interesting? spot. (1) |
| 5 | <fast> to explore </fast> because they have (.) |
| 6 | a:rtwork? (.) they ha:ve (.) mom and pop restaurants (1) |

**Transcript 8:** Tommy Insane, Big Sur from Carmel by the Sea to Monterey California | 17 Mile Drive, 4:28 - 5:01

| | |
|---|---|
| 7 Tommy; | we can't come to the beach |
| 8 | without touching and |
| 9 | feeling the sand right? |
| 10 | alright (.) sand test (.) sand test? (.) |
| 11 | and we DEfinitely (.) can't? |
| 12 | go to the beach without getting close |
| 13 | to the water (.) |
| 14 | and heck. (1) |
| 15 | even touching it (.) right? (2) |
| 16 | look at that. (2) |
| 17 | how do you guys? like that. (.) |
| 18 | <slow> some Pacific ocean water (2) |
| 19 | some California blue water (2) |
| 20 | icy cold? (1) buT (.) beautiful. </slow> |

**Transcript 9:** The Other Side, Big Sur & Beyond - 5 Days on the California Coast, 5:02 - 5:40

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 Ana; | We are (.) at (.) Old Mission Santa Barbara |
| 2 | <fast> kind of an iconic stop </fast> (.) |
| 3 | here in Santa Barbara (.) |
| 4 | but here's some history behind it? |
| 5 | these missions are all over California |
| 6 | California used to be a Spanish co?lony. |
| 7 | Spaniards came in and actually tried to |

force Native Americans to be CA?tholic and (.)
push their ideals on them
ultimately trying to make them (.)
Spanish citizens?
so it was (.) in some way (.) a form of slavery.
<fast> the his?tory behind it. </fast>
isn't the happiest sto:ry but (.)
that's kinda what history is nowada:ys
<fast> so as long as we learn from it (.)
don't repeat it (.)
try to be good people day to day </fast>
you know that's all you can do:
and now it's just a regular Catholic church?

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