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Reflexive Gentrification of Working Lands in the American West: Contesting the ‘Middle Landscape’

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To speak of authenticity means that we are aware of a changing technology of power that erodes one landscape of meaning and feeling and replaces it with another.

Sharon Zukin (2010, p. 220)

Abstract

The scenic rural landscape of Wallowa County, Oregon has attracted attention from affluent urban populations who value the physical setting and sense of rural authenticity of this remote setting. Since at least the 1990s, Wallowa County has experienced a wave of real estate investment by amenity-oriented populations, some of whom relocated permanently to the county and some of whom visit their properties only seasonally. Here, we apply the insights of rural gentrification scholarship to questions of land use and management. Specifically, we draw upon recent work on actor-oriented gentrification to highlight the ways in which land use is implicated in the reflexive processes of place (re)creation by gentrifier populations. In this case, many landowner-gentrifiers were acutely aware of their potential role in transforming the local landscape in ways which diminish local authenticity. An emergent discourse of “working lands” served as potential common ground for the imaginaries of both gentrifier and long-term resident populations. At the same time, landowner-gentrifiers instituted subtle but significant changes to land use practices in an attempt to reconcile their interests in consumption and protection with their interests in maintaining more traditional productivist practices. We interpret the working lands discourse as a manifestation of Leo Marx’s concept of the “middle landscape,” situated between the extremes of unpeopled wilderness and runaway capitalist production.

Keywords: land use; amenity migration; land ownership change; rural gentrification; reflexivity

1.0 Introduction

In 2006, the *New York Times* Real Estate section profiled the landscape surrounding the former timber town of Joseph (population 1,100) in remote, rural Wallowa County, Oregon, USA. At the dizzying height of the mid-2000s real estate boom, the *Times* marveled at the low price of rural land in a setting with scenic qualities rivaling Aspen, Colorado: “Wallowa Valley is still a bargain for those coming from coastal urban areas... Anything over \$1 million will get you more acres than you are likely to want or need, unless you are bringing a cattle trailer along” (Preusch, 2006). Despite its long history as an off-the-map retreat for movie stars and an investment arena for urban wealth, Wallowa County was in some ways “discovered” by affluent retirees and second-home shoppers during the post-millennial real estate bubble. The process of rural gentrification in Wallowa County affected not only housing stock, but vast acreages of farm, range, and forest land as well. Between 2000 and 2008 alone, over 130,000 acres of Wallowa County land transferred to buyers whose permanent address was outside the county at the time of purchase (Abrams & Bliss, 2013), representing nearly a quarter of the county’s nonindustrial acreage. These rural estates, ranging from a few acres on the outskirts of town to thousands of acres in remote reaches of the county, took on new roles in the local community as emphasis shifted from producing crops, cattle, and timber to producing wildlife, exclusivity, “naturalness,” and space for the performance of urban, middle-class ideals of rural living.

Such transformations in Wallowa County’s land ownership structure highlight the fact that rural gentrification implies changes beyond the boundaries of the human community and built environment, the usual foci for gentrification studies. While previous research has applied Neil Smith’s (1979, 1996) “rent gap” approach to rural land use dynamics (Darling, 2005; Sayre, 2002), or considered the linkages between capital accumulation and gentrification-related land use more broadly (Freidberger, 1999), the insights of recent actor-oriented gentrification research (e.g., Brown-Saracino, 2009; Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010; Butler & Robson, 2003; Law, 2001; Stockdale, 2010) have yet to make their mark on questions of rural land use. Here, we take an initial step toward remedying this gap by exploring the relevance of gentrifiers’ subjective experiences in the communities they “purchase into” for understanding land use dynamics in gentrifying environments. We pay particular attention to gentrifiers’ self-reflexivity and the means by which they manage their own effects on the receiving community. Our objectives here are threefold: first, to make the case that analyses of land ownership and use dynamics can (and, in many cases, should) be informed by theories of rural gentrification; second, to explore the particular ways that land use dynamics are informed by class-based processes of population displacement; and third, to highlight the importance of self-reflexivity and the ideal of rural “authenticity” in the gentrification process, including their relevance for decisions regarding land use and access.

2.0 Rural Gentrification, Land Use, and Reflexivity

Applications of urban gentrification theory to processes of rural change have established the applicability of this body of work to rural settings (Brown-Saracino, 2009; Ghose, 2004; Phillips, 1993, 2002, 2005; Stockdale, 2010) and highlighted important distinctions between urban and rural gentrification processes (Darling, 2005; Phillips, 1993; Smith & Phillips, 2001). A theme that emerges consistently on

both sides of the urban-rural divide is the importance of “authenticity” as a key cultural factor implicated in the broader process of gentrification (Brown-Saracino, 2009; Butler & Robson, 2003; Hines, 2007; Zukin, 2010). Maintaining authenticity in the context of gentrification, moreover, implies a complex process of negotiating change on the part of both gentrifiers and pre-existing residents. These negotiations take place in the context of dynamics unique to gentrification in specifically rural environments, including the importance of particular “rural idylls” (Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010; Nelson et al., 2010; D. P. Smith & Phillips, 2001), the role of land tenure in shaping specific outcomes (Darling, 2005), and the associations between rural restructuring and gentrification (Hines, 2010; Law, 2001).

In contrast to the generally apolitical fields of counterurbanization and amenity migration, with which it shares much common ground (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Phillips, 2010), rural gentrification scholarship attends to issues of capital flows, class conflict, displacement, and resistance (Stockdale, 2010). Unlike the largely North American-centered amenity migration literature and the more European post-productivism / multifunctionality literature, however, scholarship on rural gentrification has largely avoided explicitly confronting issues of land use beyond the immediate residential environment. Because rural gentrification so often includes transformations in the ownership and use of large areas of land, and because decisions regarding land use on these estates are intimately connected to class-based visions of nature and rurality, the insights of gentrification theory have the potential to contribute greatly to understandings of land use dynamics in contested rural environments. Indeed, the community-level negotiations and contestations regarding practices associated with farming, livestock grazing, forestry, environmental management, and tenure regimes—and their role in (re)producing an “authentic” rural environment—may have strong parallels with struggles over the fates of public and private spaces in more urban contexts (Brown-Saracino, 2009).

An important recent development in the study of rural gentrification (mirrored to some degree in the literatures of amenity migration and counterurbanization) is a movement away from conventional framings of impacts as resulting from the unreflexive imposition of one set of class-based ideals onto a preexisting “traditional” landscape of social and environmental activity (Butler & Robson, 2003; Nelson, 2002; Robbins et al., 2009; Smith & Krannich, 2000). Scholars such as Brown-Saracino (2009), Bryson & Wyckoff (2010), Butler & Robson (2003), Law (2001), & Mordue (1999) have emphasized the importance of self-reflexivity on the part of gentrifiers, particularly as regards their impacts on receiving locales and subsequent negotiations of identity and social / political action within their adopted communities. Indeed, Brown-Saracino (2009) devotes much of her study to understanding “social preservationists,” gentrifiers in both urban and rural contexts who are critical of the gentrification process (and self-critical as a result) and who work to protect particular visions of the pre-gentrification landscape: “Almost all [gentrifiers] recognized that they were participants in a process that leads to longtime residents’ physical, political, and cultural displacement. Many were concerned with preserving one form of local authenticity or another, and few supported wholesale transformation” (p. 4). Law (2001, p. 304) concludes his study of resort-centered gentrification in southern Canada with a similar observation: “spurred by global dynamics of demography, attendant consumption patterns, and the spread of global consumption do not necessarily result in the sort of cultural annihilation often found in contemporary literature. Rather, these same threatening processes can serve as

catalysts for conscious negotiation of identity explicitly conducted at the iconic level.”

That such processes of self-reflexivity may carry over into the realm of land use is only beginning to be explored. Heley (2010, p. 325-326) noted that new rural landowners’ self-reflexivity regarding claims to local legitimacy tempered their interest in reforming foxhunting in rural England: “Perceiving that open opposition towards the hunt would significantly reduce their claim to rural credentials, members of the new squirearchy shared a tacit understanding that they would ‘keep quiet’ on the subject.” Indeed, rural gentrifiers’ complex place-specific rural idylls and strong senses of self-reflexivity may influence land use outcomes in significant ways, in particular through the process of negotiating the maintenance of “working lands” locally (Abrams & Bliss, 2013). This article explores this idea through an examination of the case of rural gentrification in Wallowa County, Oregon.

3.0 Setting

Wallowa County (See Figure 1) in remote northeast Oregon is bounded by canyons and mountain ranges on four sides and lies distant from major population centers. The county’s economy has been heavily tied to timber and agriculture ever since the first wave of EuroAmerican settlers forcibly displaced the indigenous Nez Perce in the late nineteenth century. While the county’s most productive ponderosa pine timberlands have been controlled by either extralocal corporate entities or the federal government since the early 1900s, farms, ranches, and marginal timberlands largely remained in the hands of independent family operators through the twentieth century, and multigenerational tenure on family farms and ranches is common (Abrams, 2011). Grazing by sheep and, later, beef cattle have been predominant land uses across the county’s semiarid rangelands since EuroAmerican settlement. On irrigated and dryland farms, agricultural producers typically rotate crops of wheat, hay (grass and alfalfa), and other frost-hardy species. As described below, these typical productivist land uses have been unevenly maintained through the rural gentrification process.

Wallowa County underwent a period of economic restructuring following both the early 1980s farm crisis and a mid-1990s shutdown of federal timber harvesting, which eventually contributed to the shuttering of all three of the county’s sawmills. Relatively well-paying manufacturing jobs were replaced largely with seasonal, low-paying service-sector jobs following this period of restructuring (Christoffersen, 2005). Despite these economic hardships, Wallowa County has remained a magnet for tourists, hunters, retirees, and second-home seekers due to its scenic beauty and access to extensive public lands. Unlike more urban-proximate locations in the American West, Wallowa County has not experienced runaway residential development or rapid population growth (cf. Otterstrom & Shumway, 2003; Travis, 2007). Total county population has remained within the range of 6,000-8,000 residents since the 1930s, and U.S. Census data show that recent demographic changes are characterized by out-migration of young adults and in-migration of adults of retirement and pre-retirement age. Land ownership and use transitions here mirror those documented in other remote rural regions of the arid intermountain West (Gosnell et al., 2007; Gosnell et al., 2006; Gosnell & Travis, 2005; Haggerty & Travis, 2006; Travis, 2007; Yung & Belsky, 2007) in which large tracts of farm, ranch, and forest land transfer from production-oriented families

Figure 1: Wallowa County is located in the remote northeastern corner of the state of Oregon, USA.



to “amenity” owners. These newer landowners, the prime agents of gentrification, are generally middle-class or affluent individuals and couples from urban or suburban areas. Gentrifiers here are typically retired, independently wealthy, or able to telecommute to well-paying jobs with the aid of internet and telephone connectivity.

4.0 Methods

For this case study, 51 semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with 70 individuals between 2008 and 2010. Interviewees were initially chosen from a random sample of landowners listed on the county tax lot database. Following this first round, further interviewees were chosen selectively for their insights regarding the phenomenon of land ownership and land use change, often based on snowball sampling from the initial interviewees (see Klepeis et al., 2009 for a similar methodology). Fifty of those interviewed were landowners whose private holdings

within the county ranged from 39 to over 10,000 acres and the remaining twenty were key stakeholders in positions such as cooperative extension, real estate, local government, land use advocacy, and renters or managers for local landowners. Interviews ranged from less than one to three hours in length, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim (one interview was not recorded per the request of the interviewee). Many landowner interviews also included walking or driving tours of their property. Several interviewees were contacted by telephone or email for updates in the months following their interview.

Interviews were transcribed and coded using iterative rounds of “open” and later “closed” coding techniques, based on a qualitative data analysis approach heavily inspired by grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006). This process was used to identify common themes and trends in the data, as well as to analyze landscape ideals, land use decision-making processes and other relevant narrative elements within individual interviews. Note that the names associated here with interview excerpts are pseudonyms used to protect interviewees’ identities, and some details are left intentionally vague. In addition to key informant interviews, other methods used to create a comprehensive case study included secondary data analysis, direct observation, historical research, and a mail-administered survey of Wallowa County landowners. See Abrams (2011) for details on methodology.

5.0 Results

...the first time I saw [the property] I fell in love with it. So we put a bid on it and ended up getting it. It’s significantly bigger than what we were looking for...I was looking for something smaller. So then now that we’ve got it what do we do with it? So one of the things that has just kind of been part of my soul or part of my ethical makeup is, I don’t want to take this and turn it into a walled garden and lock everything out, I mean it’s just part of the reason I like this [area] is that the way it’s integrated, the use of the land and the people living on it and stuff like that. And so I felt I had basically an obligation to kind of continue working it.

This excerpt from an interview with Thomas, an absentee landowner of over one hundred acres of forested land in Wallowa County, touches on two of the themes we wish to highlight. The first is the strong sense of self-reflexivity on the part of gentrifiers, a recognition that their activities as landowners could result in potentially negative effects on the “authenticity” of the local community. The second theme of importance here is support for the concept of “working lands,” the notion that land should not be “idled,” “locked up,” or devoted solely to residential consumption, but, rather, should continue to contribute to production in some way. Gentrifiers interviewed for this study frequently spoke of traditional agricultural and forestry uses as “defining” Wallowa County, as “belonging,” and as contributing to the beauty and charm of the natural and social environment. Despite common framings of amenity migration and rural gentrification as precipitating the replacement of “landscapes of production” by “landscapes of consumption” (Salamon, 2006; Slee, 2005; Walker, 2003), gentrifiers in Wallowa County were typically quite concerned about maintaining agricultural and forestry production across the landscape. This impulse derived, at least in part, from a reflexive awareness on the part of gentrifiers that the land use changes they effect carry implications for the local producer population and, consequently, for the maintenance of a valued sense of authenticity:

I've got a pretty strong interest in not being an absentee owner. I know that's a challenge. Not being somebody who buys a bunch of property and then becomes non-interested in that property but continue to be able to use for agricultural purposes, that's what the county is. [Paul, absentee owner of several hundred acres of range and forestland]

It is important to point out that not all gentrifiers embraced the ideals of continued agricultural and forestry production. Some were quite comfortable with their role in transforming the local community, often justifying their actions by pointing to their superior environmental stewardship practices. Likewise, a handful of extremely wealthy "trophy ranchers" (Gentner & Tanaka, 2002) had no apparent qualms about pushing livestock off the land to favor big game habitat for their personal hunting estates. Yet, for many gentrifiers, it was precisely Wallowa County's identity as a Jeffersonian agrarian landscape that distinguished it from other, already gentrified parts of the rural West, and this agrarian identity—along with the exclusiveness it produces—was frequently seen as in need of protection:

Fred: There's a small group of [newcomers] here that, which we're a part of, but we're not on this particular issue, and that is getting a new ski area for this [county].

Melinda: We argue against that quite strongly because we don't want to see the valley – you know there's enough tourism here as it is... we don't want to be another Ketchum or Sun Valley [Idaho] or even Bend [Oregon]. That kind of stuff worries us quite a little bit.

Fred: We like the idea of being sort of the end of the road here... [Fred and Melinda, year-round landowners of eighty acres of farmland]

Gentrifiers' self-reflexivity implied an active process of managing rural change so as to avoid reproducing the trajectory of places that had lost their sense of authenticity. Support for "working lands" was, thus, strongly tied to a construction of Wallowa County as a place retaining its authentic rural character. This support for continued agricultural production among many gentrifiers would seem to mesh well with the interests of agricultural producers and long-time Wallowa County residents. Yet the imaginaries of these two class-cultural groups were not always well-aligned with one another, resulting in tensions and contestations over what conserving "working lands" actually entails.

Producers and long-term rural residents were nearly unanimous in their support for continued agricultural and forestry production. They shared with gentrifiers a fear of the loss of traditional land uses to the gentrification process, often passionately decrying the "locking up" of productive land as private hunting estates, nature preserves, or residential space. At the same time, producers often revealed a quintessentially "productivist" habitus (cf. Shucksmith, 1993) that was notably absent from gentrifiers' discourse. In this sense, continued production was seen as necessary to reproduce a particular set of human-land relationships on which both humans and the land depend:

...cows are there to harvest the grass, keep the fire danger down...and keep the brush down. You cut – you keep them cows off there two or three years, pretty soon you got nothing but brush, you ain't got no grass, you got brush.

Well, brush takes moisture away from your trees bad, cows don't eat it so consequently you starve the trees for moisture, so you're hurting the forest every time you take a cow off. [Alvin, multigenerational producer and landowner]

The urban, middle-class habitus of gentrifiers, on the other hand, had strong affinities with a view of nature as in need of protection from the ravages of capitalist production, including capitalist agricultural production, complicating a simple embrace of continued "traditional" land uses. Indeed, even while broadly embracing an agrarian vision for Wallowa County, gentrifiers frequently expressed reservations regarding specific productivist practices, such as cattle grazing, intensive farming practices, the use of pesticides and herbicides, and harvesting of older trees. This stance often put gentrifiers at odds with producers and long-time rural residents, for whom such practices represented important components of the continued "working landscape." Furthermore, gentrifiers' rural estates were important consumptive assets, not only for residential space but also for recreational activities such as horseback riding, fishing, and hunting. Productive interests associated with "working lands" could, therefore, come at the cost of consumption and protection functions (Holmes, 2006). For example, consider the tradeoffs between production, protection, and consumption expressed by an avid upland bird hunter and landowner:

I don't like the gra – there's all sorts of things about grazing. I know it's not good for the riparian [areas] and I know it opens the door for invasive weeds. And we don't have, we've got natural grasses out here still and, so, not a lot of grazing. We are all – everyone, my family...we're all real interested in the wildlife. So whatever we can do to restore to as natural as possible. Try to remove even the scars that we put in, in this building process [for the house]...if we get through year one and things go well, I'd love to get back to raising [game birds]. I'd love to introduce mountain quail up here, because there's virtually none, there's...a few in Wallowa County and that's it except for the west side of Oregon. And of course chukar and hunt pheasant, it'd just be fun to do that. [Doug, year-round landowner of several hundred acres of rangeland]

The discursive support for continued "working lands" among gentrifiers existed in tension with other strong sets of impulses: to treat purchased land in an environmentally sensitive manner (often implying management improvements over past productivist uses) and to maintain opportunities for rural lifestyle consumption. These competing affinities were reconciled in various ways through the particular land use decisions enacted by gentrifiers. Three examples of approaches taken by gentrifiers to reconcile these interests through land use are spatial segregation, selective access control, and management innovation.

5.1 Spatial Segregation

Gentrifiers were frequently observed to demarcate separate zones of their property and dedicate these to variable mixes of consumption, protection, and production uses. Because Oregon's land use laws generally discourage rural subdivision and small-lot development (Walker & Hurley, 2011), many gentrifiers expressed a sense

of having more land than they knew what to do with; consequently, they often dedicated the area immediately surrounding the home to consumptive and protective uses, leasing out the bulk of the parcel to producers for continued “working” uses (sometimes with special protections for sensitive areas):

Melinda: But primarily the land use here is grazing and pasture and hay, we lease out all of the hay fields to an adjacent neighbor because –

Fred: We use about eleven of the eighty [acres we own] for ourselves, for the horses and the paddocks, and the rest of it—and that would include the trees and the wetlands—we fenced those off so that the cows grazing can’t get into those areas. They had had unlimited access [under the previous owner] but they’d done so much damage to the land,

Melinda: Well the first two years we were here we worked real closely with Soil and Water Conservation [District], got grant money to go ahead and fence off areas to protect the stream area, because we’ve got a live stream that runs through the place, it’s not a big stream but it does eventually get back to the river, and when we moved in the cows just frolicked in it, it had no real designated bank really. [Fred and Melinda, year-round landowners of eighty acres of farmland]

Another model of spatial segregation entailed differential treatment of irrigated land, rangeland, and forestland. For example, forests were often managed primarily for protective and consumptive uses, irrigated lands primarily for production, and rangelands for variable mixes of protection, consumption and production. In general, gentrifiers emphasized cattle grazing over commercial timber harvesting as a land use in need of support in order to maintain a sense of local “authenticity.” Whereas cattle were often conspicuously present on gentrified properties, forestry operations were typically managed so that their impacts would, to the extent possible, be largely invisible. This suggests divergent meanings for these two land uses within the local symbolic order (cf. Burton, 2004).

5.2 Selective Access Control

Gentrifiers frequently leased large portions of their properties to local producers. This was especially common on larger estates containing extensive areas of irrigated land or rangeland. A multitude of factors influenced leasing decisions, including leasers’ claims of “localness” and the existence of lease agreements prior to purchase. In addition to these factors, some gentrifiers showed preferential treatment for leasers who demonstrated particularly progressive or “green” stewardship practices, such as the avoidance of feedlot livestock production methods, avoidance of chemical pesticide or herbicide use, or no-till farming methods. According to Paul, a gentrifier who had purchased shortly before my interview with him: “if I don’t graze my own animals on [my rangeland] then I will lease land to somebody who’s doing grass-fed beef. I’m not going to lease it to somebody who’s doing traditional commodity beef, I’ll lease it to somebody who’s doing grass-fed beef.” Forest-owning gentrifiers likewise preferentially used forest consultants who could speak the language of “sustainability” and hired management contractors who had a reputation for being “light on the land.” While not ubiquitous among gentrifiers, selective access control was significant enough to have encouraged several leasers

to construct specifically “green”-oriented stewardship identities as a means of ensuring continued access to gentrifying lands (Abrams & Bliss, 2013).

5.3 Management Innovation

In spite of the fact that long-term rural residents frequently accused gentrifiers of neglecting management on their properties, truly “passive” or “hands-off” management across an entire estate was exceedingly rare. More common was a shift away from intensive production practices to management models that appeared more “sustainable,” often based on alternative or innovative stewardship approaches in which protection (and, to some degree, consumption) interests were emphasized relative to production. For example, herds of the most common cattle breeds (Angus and Hereford) were often replaced, partially or entirely, by less common breeds, particularly those known to be more docile, lighter on the land, or simply more unusual. A number of gentrifiers expressed reservations about using synthetic chemical herbicides to control noxious, invasive plant populations and looked for alternative means of control. For some this meant extensive, ongoing labor to pull invasive weeds out manually; for others it meant experimenting with tilling, mowing, replanting, and other mechanical control techniques:

And the other thing is we have some invasive vegetation here, I noticed it when we bought [the property]. These thistles. You know I think it’s Scotch thistle and you know, the bigger one that isn’t quite as bad, I don’t remember its name. But my goal is to try to get rid of that and I’ve been reading up on that. And you do pull out by hand a number of the bigger, I think it’s Canadian thistle or bull thistle...So, we pulled some out by hand and we’re looking at ways to get rid of the rest but it seems to involve chemicals and I’m not fully on board with that yet...I would rather not use chemicals. I don’t know what else it would kill at this point or what the impact would be on wildlife so I need to do a lot more research. [Kate, absentee owner of over one hundred acres of range and forestland].

Some gentrifiers limited their use of chemical herbicides to only the most tenacious weed populations, favoring mechanical methods for species that were easier to eradicate. A preference for a landscape free of synthetic chemicals likewise appeared in the form of organic gardens and small farms, which were common on gentrified properties. Gentrifiers’ management innovations were also evident on forested properties: management models focused on retaining larger trees in a diversity of species while removing smaller and unhealthy trees were often adopted from particularly progressive long-term landowners. Other gentrifiers were less sophisticated in their forest management approach, focusing on simple metrics such as large trees or an abundance of trees as indicators of forest ecological health.

It is important to point out that an affinity for environmentally “progressive” land management approaches was not the sole purview of affluent urban migrants and absentee owners. Several “traditional” producers interviewed for this study expressed discomfort with or distaste for particular components of modern production processes (e.g., soil tillage, use of livestock growth stimulants). While it would be inaccurate to say that gentrifiers’ and producers’ visions of proper land stewardship were closely aligned, neither would it be accurate to cast them as mutually exclusive. Instead, it seems fair to say that sufficient areas of overlap

existed that the changes in land use and access effected by the rural gentrification process in Wallowa County created openings for some producers to experiment with practices that were previously limited not by their own visions of stewardship but rather by opportunity (and, to some degree, a sense of legitimacy). Indeed, the rising importance of affluent urban tastes on the Wallowa County landscape resulted in sufficient local market demand for alternative agricultural products (e.g., grass-finished beef, organically-grown produce) to support, at least in part, several local niche producers' livelihoods.

6.0 Conclusions

In Wallowa County, the embrace of local "authenticity," as well as widespread self-reflexivity regarding the effects of gentrification, was closely tied to discursive support for the concept of "working lands" among rural gentrifiers. The self-reflexive stance portrayed in the discourse of many rural gentrifiers suggests that processes of rural gentrification in the American West have been occurring long enough, and their framings have propagated widely enough, that many gentrifiers arrived in the local arena with conscious intent to not repeat the mistakes of past gentrifiers. They therefore constantly monitored their actions in light of both community norms and their own ideals of rural authenticity. Far from the oblivious dolts sometimes portrayed in popular and academic accounts, gentrifiers were typically quite aware of their potential impacts on the community and landscape. Furthermore, many actively attempted to regulate these impacts through a conscious embrace of the agrarian ideals captured in the concept of a "working landscape."

While this would seem to imply a rapprochement between gentrifiers and long-time rural residents regarding land use, a closer inspection reveals the ways in which the "working lands" vision was strongly managed and existed in tension with primarily consumptive or protective interests. Gentrifiers demonstrated a number of strategies for reconciling these competing interests, in effect inscribing a particular vision of the "working landscape" as well as delimiting it against more consumption- or protection-oriented uses. Self-reflexivity clearly played an important role in the site-specific dynamics of this case of rural gentrification, but it also had its limitations. The revisionary nature of gentrifiers' particular "working lands" definition—with its strongly middle-class conceptions of nature and rurality—was rarely acknowledged by gentrifiers themselves. This supports Brown-Saracino's (2009) observation that gentrifiers' management of authenticity is always partial and selective, privileging some actors, social groups, and activities and leaving others unacknowledged. Hence, an apparent community consensus on the importance of "working lands" in Wallowa County may obscure as much as it reveals (Abrams & Bliss, 2013; Wolf & Klein, 2007).

The "working lands" ideal profiled here can be seen as an attempt to create a "landscape of reconciliation" or "middle landscape" (Marx, 2000) which embraces active human stewardship of the land while also critiquing agriculture's location within contemporary industrial capitalism. Such an interpretation fits well with Leo Marx's (2000) view of the American pastoral ideal as an attempt to reconcile competing visions of capitalism, to envision rural space as husbanded by free people (in contrast to an unpeopled "wilderness") yet still insulated from the insidious effects of capitalist modernity. The middle-class agrarian ideal in Wallowa County implicitly rejected the purely consumption- and protection-focused land use models characteristic of other gentrified landscapes, without committing to a continuation

of specific productivist practices. It implied the maintenance of some kind of continued agricultural or forestry production while leaving open the possibility that such production would depart from conventional models.

In contrast to Sheridan's (2007, p. 122-123) claim that "urban America is attempting to produce Western rural spaces...that marginalize or destroy the extractive West," the (formerly urban) gentrifiers in Wallowa County appear to idealize at least some aspects of conventional productive land uses, even if their sympathies diverged from those of producers in many of the details. For example, gentrifiers generally did not envision radical rewritings of local narratives, such as "rewilding" the county (*a la* the "Wildlands Project" promoted by some environmental groups) or transforming it into a four-season recreation destination along the lines of Sun Valley, Idaho or Bend, Oregon. Rather, the contestations that did appear concerned sometimes subtly divergent views of a "middle landscape" situated between unmanaged wilderness and unrestrained capitalist production. While most of the players in this social drama agreed on the broad importance of a continued agricultural community identity, contestations centered on which social groups would define the parameters of this identity, what specific land uses would characterize it, and, ultimately, who would benefit from the changes this vision implies.

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