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Parking Lot Park: seven stories of San Clemente Canyon

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Parking Lot Park: Seven Stories of San Clemente Canyon

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts by Katherine Rose Clark

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2014
The thesis of Katherine Rose Clark is approved and it is acceptable in quantity and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Parking Lot Park: Seven Stories of San Clemente Canyon

by

Katherine Rose Clark

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Teddy Cruz, Chair

Parking Lot Park is a live public event that maps the various geographies -
geologic, political, social, and sexual- which intersect within the first Open Space Park of
San Diego, California: San Clemente Canyon.

Currently known as Marian Bear Park, the land has undergone many
transformations: formerly a harvest spot for the Kumeyaay and later grazing territory for
Mission era cattle ranchers, the presently U.S.-owned canyon was protected from
highway expansions in the 1970s by its namesake, Marian Bear.

Parking Lot Park unfolded November 8th, and 9th 2014 as a sound promenade and
drive-in theater within the canyon itself. Staged for audiences of 50, participants
traversed the canyon with flashlights to discover 6 sound installations.

Each sound promenade station gave voice to an individual layer of the human
geography of Marian Bear Park. Projected through a set of custom-built speakers, stories
were told through looping recorded vocal narration, and are interwoven and
counterbalanced with processed and manipulated field recorded sounds from the canyon.
The evening concluded with a drive-in theater about the origin myth erotics of the canyon, accompanied by an FM radio sound composition designed for the insulated intimacy of a car cab.

By drawing out individual threads of material and social engagement in San Clemente Canyon, the project proposes that landscape is a constantly shifting expression of emergent, dominant, and residual patterns. Parking Lot Park presents geologic time as both erotic and contingent as the dynamic between lovers, and conversely, that human environmental influence is as much of a layer as sedimentary rock.

story, installation design, video, direction: Kate Clark
sound, installation design, direction: Samuel Dunscombe
PART II: STORIES

In chronological order

YOLI
Kumeyaay Captain
7,000 BCE

First the stream came to the canyon, then oaks, and then Yoli.

She hunted amongst the trees. She patted their trunks. They’d grown muscle since the last visit, giving acorns thick and brown as her thumbs.

She walked towards the boulders hidden amongst the river groves. The trees were deep enough to cool a day of work.

Yoli rubbed her hands over the rock slab. She dipped her hands into the grinding hole, scooped out water and leaves. Many before her had chosen this harvest spot.

She pulled a piece of granite from her pouch. It took her three days hiking east to find a stone strong enough to meet the canyon boulders without crumbling.

Between her family’s journeys from the foothills to the coast, materials came and went.

Willow needed reweaving, yucca blossoms bursting for harvest.

Clams shouting for digging, another crop of huts left to the mesa as they moved camp.

A new slaughter: red.
A new drought: brown.

A new stand of oak: green.

She scooped the acorn meat into the hole and began to pound.

Yesterday they had spent shucking those seeds. Cracking forever, massaging until the yellow flesh lay pure in their baskets.

It felt to her like their lives were made of weaving, cutting, and rubbing.

Narrow lines, braided into baskets. Wide circles looped between mountains and coasts. Deep holes, carved into stone by the needs of their bellies.

Each year their marks grew thin or thick, but their sweep remained the same.

When the acorns had softened into meal, she strained them through leaves.

Some said the dark bitter was good for the body, but she rinsed until the water stayed clear.

She lined a basket with the pulp, dropped in fire-heated stones. Soon it would thicken into sweet blonde mash. As she stirred, she could taste it: acorn mush, venison, clams.

A perfect triangle, drawn from their movements.
Clemente slicked his knife against a wet stone. He ground until he could shave a crescent from his thumbnail.

Cows wandered through the canyon basin: 100 mouths, ripping up grass, snuffling, dipping into water.

The herd belonged to Clemente. Clemente belonged to the Indians. But Clemente's name belonged to the Spanish. The priest said it meant gentle but he wasn't so sure about that.

He started to walk down the hill towards the mass of black and white milling through the stream.

The other day someone said that a revolution had happened. So he guessed that meant he was Mexican now. Not that it made a difference. Same cattle, same canyon. He scanned for rumps that carried his mark he had burned.

At least, Clemente thought, he didn't have to learn any new languages. Unlike his grandma, who was still using those sounds and hand signals almost nobody could understand.

But after their diseases boiled her husbands’ skin and stopped his breath she decided she never wanted to feel their words moving through her throat.
Clemente whistled sharp across the canyon to the others, time to start. Two men approached the first cow with ropes in hand. Horns yanking left and right, eyes rolling, the animal knew what was coming.

As soon as they tied it down, Clemente grasped a lance and drove it unto the throat, bursting a spigot of red. He wrenched an arc through the neck. He severed the testicles. A ring of blood surged around the body, soaking into the soil.

This is how it went: Half the herd lanced and left to drain.

He crouched down to the emptied animal and lashed the hooves. Grunting, he and two men hoisted the steer to hang from an oak. It swung heavy under the leaves.

He sliced latitudes around the legs and sides, unstitching the hide. He yanked, peeling the skin. The hide slicked off like a jacket. Fat clung warmly to the swaying form. He trimmed the yellow cords and soon he had a pile the size of his own body.

Later, they stood around the boiling pot and watched the raw fat plume golden clear. Dragging over the leather bags, one of the men laughed,

"You ever think about it? If they did it to us? Skinned us up, and filled us with our own fat?"

Clemente poured in the liquid. “Wonder what they’d trade us for.”
Tomorrow he'd set out early, towards the ship masts on the coast. Only hide and tallow would trade, no market for meat. So Clemente left most the cows to rot in the canyon grasses. 50 bodies, skinned for the flies.

**JACOB**
Highway Developer
1950

Before Jacob earned his name as Mr. Freeway, he was just one of the millions of Californians employed by WWII. He called those times the “early days, where you’d fire a rocket and lose track of them. It would go every which way.”

After Navy service, Jacob got hired as San Diego’s chief highway engineer. But military dynamics still shaped his labor. In the city that referred to itself as the birthplace of California, the military employed a third of San Diego's exploding population whose transit flows Jacob was tasked to manage. At the time, only 25 miles of highway existed. Jacob had strong thoughts about this dynamic, he said,

“The population explosion has been accompanied by considerable public trauma aided by professional forecasters of the imminent end of the world. As usual, however, the public by and large has not panicked but wisely has spread out to give itself breathing space in search for privacy and personal identity. The Stanford Research Institute has called it a ‘growing revolt of the individual against being treated as part of a herd.’ So I tell you that evidence is accumulating that overcrowding leads to neurotic and abnormal behavior ranging from thoughtless discourtesy to savagery. From the dawn of civilization, cities
and states with the best transportation systems have achieved the highest standards of living, have advanced their culture ahead of their time and have been able to maintain themselves militarily against envious and aggressive neighbors.”

By 1950, San Diego's largest post-war suburb was built. Clairemont's design represented a new concept in community living. Instead of the traditional grid, winding streets granted views onto San Clemente canyon.

Housing development churned along and so did Jacob's highways, looping and splitting the city. He had a simple equation: “We find out where people are coming from and where they’re going. Then we draw a straight line from A to B, and that’s where we try to build a freeway.”

Jacob lived out by the shores of Bird Rock. Perhaps that's why he was prone to hiding San Diego’s freeways in canyons and valleys. Sometimes this lead to conflict, like on November 15th, 1961, during a public hearing for Clairemont, when locals protested plans for highway 52’s development straight through the floor of San Clemente canyon.

Controversy was simply part of his job. He was familiar with the sight of his own body hung in effigy by angry citizens. And though they argued for open space, he liked to remind people that freeways were the open space of the future.

Standing at the podium, he took a sip of coffee, set it down, and calmly addressed the crowd:
“I'd like to remind you that in 1880 New York City removed 15,000 dead horses from streets and as late as 1912 Chicago carted away nearly 10,000 horse carcasses. So. The average person's resistance to change makes the tasks of modernizing a great city exceedingly difficult. These difficulties are compounded by a growing segment of the population that wants to preserve the past at all costs. Only decadent peoples, on the way down, feel an urgent need to mythologize and live in the past. A vigorous people, on the way up, has visions of its future.”

MARIAN
Clairemont Resident
1970

From the window of her house, Marian Bear tries to imagine a line of concrete crashing through her backyard. She takes a pull from her cigarette. It’s impossible. She needs to set her kids loose into the canyon and not see them until dinner, instead of worrying about them being crushed by semis going 70 miles an hour.

During her morning walks, Marian sees the most activity in the bottom of the canyon. She watches the tadpoles gather and weeks later she hears their call and response with the crickets. After droughts, the oaks and sycamore along the basin are the first to refresh green. Once down there she even saw a mountain lion.

So after Marian learns about the city's proposal to route the new highway through the floor of San Clemente Park, she calls a meeting and takes to the roof. Standing on shingles, she declares to her neighbors they are going to fight the development.
Her pear shaped vowels make for strong delivery. Mostly local women join in. During those years, Marian’s husband and kids get used to fending for their own dinners. Most evenings, the living room is filled with debating neighbors.

Marian’s years in theater also pay off at city hall, where uninvited she sweeps past secretaries into hearing rooms. People often ask why she doesn’t run for office. But she’s already fought for Claremont bus systems as a civilian. So why become a bureaucrat?

After ten years and countless hearings, the city concedes and re-directs the highway. Now circling the lip of the canyon, the 52 connects the 5 to the 805.

Sunken below traffic circuits, the land below Marian's house is shorn into a pocket of green. In order to hear the crickets and frogs before the morning traffic keys up, Marian leaves thirty minutes earlier. She does this each morning for another ten years until city officials visit her home. They come to announce the renaming of San Clemente Park in her honor. Marian would have been surprised to learn the news, but she doesn't hear them because she’s in a coma and will pass in a few months.

KATE
2013
Student

At one o'clock on a Wednesday, two vehicles idle in the lot. Windows down, elbows out: a single man sits in each car, expressionless in the heat. As Kate and Ben walk into the canyon, the heads of the men follow them.
An interpretive booth stands at the trailhead. The signs have faded to whispers:
transparent mountain lions, Kumeyaay grinding stones under peeling laminate, varicose
vein contour maps, all-caps warning messages neutered by sun. One sign still clearly
announces:

MARIAN BEAR MEMORIAL OPEN SPACE PARK
Formerly San Clemente Park

Kate and Ben follow the barren streambed, towards a meadow ringed with sycamore.
Wearing wedge heels and a pencil skirt, Kat
efeels absurd and titillated in the highway
park, as if she and a fellow office worker were out for a lunchtime quickie.

She chooses a meadow lifting into hills. They begin to eat.

"Would you like some pear."
"Sure. Mmm. Did you put lemon on this or something?"
"It keeps the fruit from going brown."

Earlier in the day, Kate set a knife against a cucumber and split it into spears. She
spooned a field of rice. She gathered sheaves of nori, oily and gritty with salt, and
emptied an avocado. As she prepared her food, she imagined sharing it with him. She
dredged a bruising pear with lemon juice.
Bruise ready fruit was her sign of admiration for him. The code seemed so obvious when she was preparing the lunch. Perhaps it's been blocked by the glare of the sun. Or severed by off ramps.

"So you've been here before?"

"Once, a long time ago."

"So it's kind of strange here huh. Who goes here?"

"People who live around here? I dunno."

"It seems kind of empty for a park."

Kate feels a weight that even the crisp sheets of seaweed won't lift.

"Crickets, hmm." Ben trails off.

"What about crickets?"

"Oh, never mind, I don't really, ah, want to talk about it."

"Oh."

Despite their awkwardness, Kate longs to run her finger down bridge of his nose, towards the hollow where his collarbones empty.

"Come on, please, tell me about the crickets."

"Oh. Cognitive scientists are researching their reflex systems. To understand the mechanism that causes them to rub their legs against their bodies."

"Oh. So what is the research for?"

"To anticipate when the cricket will chirp."

"Why would you want to do that?"

"Because you could apply it to more complex structures. Like human neuron firings. To anticipate behavioral patterns."
She takes a pear slice and presses it against her mouth. She'd forgotten there's a whole field of science out there laboring to connect insect behavior to larger living systems, including herself. She's insulted by research concerning one-to-one premeditation of organic movement. Dialogue concerning scientific progress won't go anywhere now that she is personally offended and has gone opaque.

Kate regards the sycamores that rim their picnic.

"It seems like a stretch that you could apply the mechanism for how a cricket will stroke its legs to how a human makes a decision."
"Yeah. But it's an algorithm, everything can be tuned to the small scale."

She makes out the bulb body of a hummingbird alight upon the crown of a tree. She watches it transition from the pulsing flight of a gnat to the stilled bulk of a hawk. She wants to point to it, but it doesn't seem like the right moment.
Ben starts: "Let's stop talking about this."
"Yeah, sorry, you did say you didn't want to bring it up."
Kate shakes herself.
"Say, how would you feel about having a moment together out here?"
He responds ambiguously: "hmmm."
Kate gestures towards a field of dried out reeds that reach past their heads.
"Let's try."
He is less enthusiastic, but follows her, crunching through dead plants. The sun beats over them. He squints.
"Sorry, this isn't going to work- I don't like being so exposed by the sun."
He does look very uncomfortable.

"Okay. You're right. Okay, never mind. Another time."

They exit the reeds and it's all gone. She returns to the perch of the hummingbird. She walks ahead of him, aware again of the absurdity of her office clothing.

Before Kate and Ben reach the parking lot, he pulls her towards him. She descends.

"Put your mouth on me."

Parched, she responds.

Kate watches them as if they are two crickets under a microscope. She sees their bodies on the picnic table, and the empty cars of the silent men, forming a parenthesis around the parking lot.

Their bowed shapes read simply as off-stage actors.

Back in the car, Kate adjusts the air-conditioning slats towards their faces. For the moment, it's easiest to release explanation to the crickets. Shuddering, they beat a rhythm that washes over the canyon, deafening individual notes.

Kate and Ben drift onto the highway and into the bright of the day.

There are no interpretive panels to give direction.
Wyatt is a Southern California boy. He grew up near the beaches of Santa Monica. Those days even sidewalk eye contact could initiate going under the pier together. Wyatt always says it's a good thing he left home early, otherwise he'd probably be dead.

Before he knew that most of his friends would be erased by the era, Wyatt moved down to San Diego. Partially for the job, and partially to escape his mother’s household.

Someone had brought another wild parrot to the veterinarian clinic. The bird was caught in the home, flapping around, smashing itself against the walls and had damaged its wing.

So far Wyatt had treated 3 different varieties: the Red-Crowned Amazon, Green-Cheeked Amazon and Mexican Redhead. He read they were either escaped domestics or were released last the moment by black market salesmen who got cold feet before crossing into the States.

Flitting from one palm to another, the parrots would form squawking choruses near bedrooms, office complexes, parks, whatever roost suited them.

At the moment, this bird wasn't making any sounds though, just clutching Wyatt's thumb with its claws while he felt for broken bones. Parrots weren't the only migratory species local to San Diego. Unless you were completely out, a bar fly, or a bath house regular, there were only a few places for a guy with Wyatt’s interests to go. First it was Fruit
Loop in Balboa Park, but activity got so overt the bathrooms had been shut down for going on 20 years now.

They might as well just tear them down, Wyatt thought.

Once in Balboa, when he was sunbathing, he opened his eyes to find a horse looming above him. The mounted policewoman finally went away after he expressed his knowledge of the law that in any park one could be dressed at a level appropriate for a public beach.

Even at the beaches, he heard stories, how at Black's helicopters would buzz low down over folks hanging out in the greenery, and shout from a loudspeaker: “Get out of the bushes! We know what you're doing!”

That stopped when one of the perpetrators was a politically connected individual who complained about the inappropriate use of tax dollars. Moments like that always made for a good laugh, but after his friend Juan was shot in the head waiting in his car at Morley Field, Wyatt decided it was better to forego the city parks and drive to more secluded spots.

Car culture prevailed here, for better or for worse.

Late afternoon was the best time. Sitting in the driver’s seat, washed in light, listening. This time of the year with the stream being so dried out, you could hear the approach clearly above the highway: footsteps over gravel, every now and then a crunch of fallen
leaves. Sycamore wasn't the only thing showing it's autumn. Poison oak was out in full force: a tongue of scarlet flaming through the canyon. It baffled Wyatt how it moved, creeping right up to the edge, somehow knowing not to encroach upon the path. You had to be careful though, he heard some bad stories from guys who didn't know what it was. Even the police would avoid it. In the 90's during all the plainclothes arrests, when the cops found folks in the poison oak, they just waited for them to finish up and arrested them on the trail.

Wyatt flexes the parrot's plumage, running a finger across the brilliant feathers. He knows he's part of a dying culture.

He's online too, but he doesn't like how much choice there is, how much of a gamble it is to host.

Some don't even get out of their cars these days. They just drive into the lot, circle, and exit. No knight on a white horse, just a moment of what could be.

Wyatt feels the wing is dislocated from the socket. Hollow bones never guarantee repair, the blood supply is always at risk of being interrupted by abnormal movement. The damage didn't seem to be too serious. With some splinting the bird would probably fly again.
PART III: Process, Influences

It's always a balance of intuitive, quiet time and rigorous, exuberant organizing. As John Cage writes, you can't create and critique at the same time- this dictum I have tried to maintain, yet thus far, this project has been a challenge to balance: at the same time I am editing the video for the drive-in theater, I'm strategizing with designers about how to physically it. Upon completion of the live event, I will make time for critical reflection which will then be incorporated into my thesis writing. In a sense, I only feel as if the project is half way “over” after November 8th and 9th. There still is documentation to consider, threads to transpose in other settings, conversations to be had with people about their experience of the project.

While reading this text, you will notice that I cite few other visual arts projects directly in relationship to my work. The goal of this writing isn't to situate my project within an art historical context- but instead to lay out the complex personal and social terrain that this project emerged from, and to brace it directly with related research that tends to originate within other disciplines such as literature, sociology and anthropology.

There are many “art” projects that I draw from: the organizational tactics of Machine Project, the self navigated esthetics of Janet Cardiff's sound walks, the plays of temporality and historicity in the film work of Chris Marker, the materialist investigations of Ilana Halperin, the humanism of Sharon Lockhart's photography.

Yet perhaps because this project is still very fresh, I am less interested in supporting it's relevance through connecting it to other artists works. Instead, I would rather share with you the tangential strings both in-field and in-research that have pulled taught from their weaving, and to situate the movements of my own hands in the creation of their mesh. In the tradition of Lesley Stern's ficto-critical writing, passages slip between personal anecdote and theoretical frameworks.
I do not privilege the influences of Russell, the gentleman who I met sitting in his pick-up truck in the canyon less or more than encountering the pithy writings of sociologist Avery Gordon. I consider all of these influences equally valid in their own terms. This is not to say that transitioning between these registers has has been smooth. I'm sure I have made many errors that Claire Bishop would denounce. There have been many hangups, ego reevaluations, detours, and missteps along the way. Yet this project has lead me to ancient volcanoes, to dairy farms, to Kumiai communities, to craigslist sex forums, to suburban canyon councils and dance studios. I have had the chance to learn how to harvest yucca blossoms and acorn, and how people have defended canyons from neighborhood rooftops. I have learned how to design a drive in theater, and how the coast line of San Diego must have looked before highways existed. I have learned about the codes and dangers of public sex, and how tectonic forces caused landforms to unzip. I may have bitten off more than I can chew, but at least I know I have learned.

I do not know how the public will receive the event itself, but in terms of engagement with other folks, thus far on the production side, the project has opened a treasure trove of people that I have been fortunate to work with, ranging between architects, biologists, geologists, park rangers and curators. I take this as a good sign: I intend to continue developing projects that are simply too “big” for me to control and trouble shoot entirely on my own.

Collaborating with Samuel Dunscombe, on the sound, design, and concept of the project has been a blessing. Our work together began two and a half years ago, when he heard me give a public reading of the story of “Kate”- a character who at first was called “she”, then “Shell” and now finally has returned to the name of “Kate”: I now own my role in the story. After the public reading, Sam told me he had strong aural responses to the story and thought the work could benefit from incorporation of field recordings. We
first envisioned a gallery presentation of the project, but about 7 months ago on the
morning of my birthday I realized it was necessary to situate the project within the
canyon itself.

In it's original form, Parking Lot Park was simply a story that I wrote to process
my own strange experience in Marian Bear Park. As I wrote, I researched the canyon, and
learned that the park has been a popular spot for public sex for the past 30 years. I believe
that what inspired my sexual foray in that space was part of a larger pattern that
subconsciously I picked up on. This realization lead me to try to understand what forces
through time, be they geographic or social, could have built the space as both a collecting
point and a hideaway. I began to introduce other strands into the story as I learned of
them, interspersing the narrative of “Shell” with the stories of Marian, Wyatt, Clemente,
Jacob, and Yoli. Once Sam and I decided to place the project in the canyon, we separated
these threads into individual moments of encounter: constellations throughout the park.

I cannot yet tell you if the culmination of my thesis has been “successful” but I
can say that to date I feel the most grounded, clear, and full of joy in my practice. I would
be happy to continue weaving and unraveling the threads that form this kind of work for
the rest of my life.

NIGHTMARE

OCTOBER 11, 2014

Last night I had a nightmare about the failure of the project: all organization floundered,
all technical aspects fell apart. Yet the people showed up. I resorted to false hospitality,
shouting vaguely and cheerily at the crowds, forcefully directing them under the guise of
good spirits. This situation was a true nightmare because instead of being an experience
that opened into a wide swirl of self directed constellation navigation, it returned to the false charm of the megalomaniac “social” artist, where I tried to claim a middle school parade performance that happened to be occurring at the same time in the canyon as my own. I shouted at people, “Are you cold?! Do you need a sweater?” while forcing cardboard boxes of used clothing upon them. I startled awake at 4 a.m., thankful that it was a dream and that I still had a month to prepare.

KING SNAKES

JULY 24, 2014

I stand on the grey carpet of the Tecolote Nature Center, waiting for the park ranger to finish his office work. A wetland diorama looks through a pane of glass. Cat tails, willow, sumac on a windless day. A rat, taxidermied. The rat creeps through the wetlands, next to a faded coke can. A sign reads, “Our natural habitats are complex ecological balances! Respect our parks, pack it in pack it out.”

The park ranger comes out of his office.

“Thanks for waiting, we were having erosion problems. There's a neighborhood next to one of the canyons, they complained to the city because they lost some of their outbuildings. We went and checked out their properties, turns out some of them have been over watering and building too close to the canyon edge so we gave them some suggestions.”

“Oh okay. Hmm, that must be challenging work when the canyon is the city's responsibility but the private property owners are compromising it.” (I try to be both empathic and knowledgeable about how these kinds of matters go. I know the chitchat is only going to last for so long before we start negotiating.)
“Yes it is.”

The park ranger and I stand in the middle of the room. Afternoon light scoops into the canyon, blanches the sycamores and spreads through the interpretive center skylights. King snakes warm themselves behind the glass. They stretch to the terrarium lid and explore the mesh with their tongues. We walk over to the case and watch the black forks probe the metal sieving.

I look over to the park ranger.

“Why are they doing that?”

“We're not really sure, they seem to like the way it feels. Interesting, huh?”

“Yeah. Huh.”

A small chorus emerges from the mesh, pronounced and irregular as party streamer horns.

“Should we move into the conference room?”

“Sure.”

The park ranger and I sit across from each other at an oval of business-grey formica. I fold my hands and he keeps his in his lap.

“You mentioned in your e-mail you're traveling soon?”

“Yes, I'm going to Australia to present some of my work.”

“That's great. I've always wanted to go out there.”

He speaks in a clipped, halting style. Mine is a milkmaid cadence.

“Yes, hopefully there will be a chance to visit the outback a bit.”

“Oh, great.”

“I'm hoping to go into the bush, and see all the eucalypts and gum trees. That red desert.”

I try to summon a landscape that is both foreign and familiar as we sit in the Tecolote Nature Center conference room. Perhaps one day, once we have put our difference
behind ourselves, we can go into the wilderness. We both will be wearing snake boots. He'll look towards the horizon, face shadowed by a large felt hat, and point to some flickering creature. I'll nod and lift the binoculars. He looks at me pinkly.

“So I read your story and I also sent it to my superiors. And it's just not something that we're willing to promote as a city. So we won't be able to issue you the permit until you take the part out about that illegal activity. It's just not something I'm willing to put my name behind. And it's something we've been dealing with for a long time now and we just want to put it behind us.”

I bring the binoculars down and the creature flits into the shadows of the conference room.

“Oh?”

“I understand that you have written it in the most journalistic way possible but the fact of the matter is, it's illegal and the story is promoting it. But to be clear our concerns aren't about sexual orientation.”

Before I stepped into the Tecolote Nature Center, I stood next to the baseball fields and practiced my deep breathing. I held my hands in the lotus position, “Dear energies, allow me to engage this conversation with as much fortitude and clarity as possible.”

Yet my lotus of calm faded quickly. If my head had been showered in those rosy petals perhaps I would have said something like:

“Hmm, that's interesting, could you explain more to me what you mean?”

But instead, my hackles rose. How did this man, and this administration he represented have the authority to manage the content of a voluntary art project in the park? They were stewards of the environment, not it's social relations. My assumption was incorrect.
“I understand your concerns, but on the other hand, this project hasn't been commissioned. Simply by sharing a story doesn't mean it's promoting illegal activity. What you're saying could be considered an infringement of first amendment rights.”

“Well I don't know anything about that. You would have to talk to the District Manager. But I just don't understand why you want this part of the story in there. We've been dealing with this problem for the past 17 years. It just seems like you're trying to sensationalize it. And if you want to talk about illegal activity, why don't you bring up the off-roading activity, or the homeless encampments?”

“Because they don't have a historic precedent. There are significant public records about the cruising activity in the park.”

As we argued he began to look more and more to me like a wooden sculpture, fixed to his office chair, rigid and curt. How was it that we could discuss king snakes with such camaraderie, but within a few minutes I could interpret this man as a fascistic middleman, as a representative of all the homogenizing forces in my life?

We ended the meeting with plans to stay in touch.

**OPEN SPACE & AGONISM**

In an e-mail exchange with performance artist and activist Ricardo Dominguez offered responded to my approach: “While my work has been entangled institutions since 2004, for the most part the work still carries the autonomy of the 90's-where one did not really ask if one could do the gesture. We only negotiated with the institution afterwards. But that is not the performative matrix that you have established as your aesthetic.”

Ricardo had a good point- why the perhaps naive honesty? I wanted the stewards of the park to be a part of the project without feeling like the wool had been pulled over their eyes. But this is a tricky balance to establish, especially if the tone of the project was at points critical. Even when bringing up the inclusion of Jacob Dekema’s story to the park ranger, he raised concerns that it would reflect badly upon the city.

I wrote back to Ricardo, “Why indeed the performative matrix of negotiating with the institution as part of the process? I think it's a quasi ambassadorial/infiltrator/ethnographer role. The hope is that by somehow getting more entangled with them earlier in the process they will become more invested in the work to participate. Though my dream of the park ranger having a tryst with a cruiser will probably never happen I like the idea that at least they both know the 'other' will be at the art event but will still willingly show up because they are invested.”

After conversations with individuals who had been using the park for public sex since the 80's, I learned that the parks administration had been more lax in the past. Now, the social climate was tenser, many said they were often harassed even while just sitting in their parked cars. Desire line trails started to be blocked off by stumps, and the new park ranger was also known to drive through the parking lot honking his horn and flashing his lights. The mood started to shift in the early 1990's, when officers Hall and Brady were requested to open a Problem Oriented Police report, instructed by their Sergeant “to be creative.”

Hall and Brady were faced with a particular challenge of eradicating licentious behavior while maintaining the “untouched” qualities of open space. Spotlights and curfews were not allowed, but plainclothes arrests were. According to the police report,

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One of the first things Hall and Brady observed when they originally assessed activity in the park was the absence of women and children. Accordingly, they chose to use the increased percentage as one measure of the project's success. At the conclusion of the project, the officers observed a dramatic increase in the numbers of women, children, families, and youth groups using the park.³

Along with the increase of women, children, and families, surveillance cameras were erected and over 90 plainclothes arrests of homosexual men occurred. This was the snarled history I had stepped into in the consciously naïve act of publicly projecting the story of Wyatt as one element in the suite of San Clemente canyon narratives. Yet from my own experience of trying to have sex in the park with a man, from encountering topless stump scene photo shoots, and from interviews where I learned that seasoned hetero couples used the park not only as a hideout but as a stage for their public sexual activity, it was clear Marian Bear Park was not just for closeted middle aged men. Wyatt's story, juxtaposed with mine, was an important formal inclusion in the work, pointing to the idea that non-normative behavior in the space was not an aberration but part of a greater mesh of patterns and influences.

From negotiations with a newly minted senior park ranger, as well as in my previous work involving people as wide ranging as border agents to priests, what I have learned is though official representatives may appear to simply as mouthpieces of an undifferentiated edifice, ultimately, each person possesses their own form of powerful agency. Whether the machine is a park, a border, or church, it's gears keep chugging along, but the role of the individual inflects its movements in subtle and dramatic ways. A case in point is that in my discussions with veteran users of San Clemente Canyon, I learned about one influence for the earlier more relaxed mood of the park: the previous park ranger was gay.

³ Brady and O'Neill 6
Gauging the subtle potentials of the ministers of institutions in order to develop public projects may seem like more like the approach of a reformist rather than a revolutionary. I'm not so sure it's either. Essentially, I just don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water. The parks, the museums, the borders won't go away, at least in my lifetime. I'm interested in developing straightforward contractual agreements with public edifices to support gestures complex enough that their multifaceted criticality can go under the radar: hopefully opening the possibility for complication and intimacies between participants and facilitators. Instead of reformist or revolutionary, perhaps acupuncturist is a more appropriate term to work towards.

Though I sensed that the parks administration might have concerns about Wyatt's story, I underestimated their political conservatism, assuming that park rangers and councils were “naturally” more liberal. This incorrect assumption was later revealed during a conversation with Eloise Battle, a former colleague of Marian Bear. Eloise mentioned that Bear would have “smitted” people using the park for sexual purposes. As I swallowed my shock at her choice of words, my earlier rage that had left me feeling that the park ranger was simply a fascistic middleman was not so easy to summon in this moment. Her comment arose after a two-hour interview about Marian Bear's work. Eloise described how Marian had influenced her own single-handed effort to save another open space in San Diego- Tecolote Canyon- from a similar fate of concrete.

Nearly forty years ago, planned highways were re-directed to the edge of San Clemente canyon, and Marian Bear Park was deemed the first “Open Space” land in San Diego: fought for by staunch activists whose descendants I was now fighting with. I did not begin the project with a desire to have first amendment debates with a park ranger, or to force protégés of Marian Bear into uncomfortable discussions about sex in canyons. Yet it helped to remind myself that for decades, public parks have served as the brick-
and-mortar ground zero, in the words of Chantal Mouffe, for “agonistic struggle of a vibrant democracy.”

But why this commitment to the mom and pop notion of public space, when it was clear that democratic forums could more easily be forged digitally than physically? Nobody was asking for this work. Well, even if they weren't, they were still driving by the canyon every day, and it was worthwhile to forge new ways of relating to it. A similar dynamic is described in the book *Ceremonial Time*, where author John Hanson Mitchell researches the 15,000 years of history of Scratch Flat, a square mile of land outside of Boston:

They rise in the morning, they drive to work in Boston; they drive home; they eat prepared dinners; they watch television, go to the movies, go to the theater, go skiing, or go to dinner parties; and then they drive home in the darkness of night with the black line of the yet-undeveloped hills beyond them, and rarely thinking about the fact that not so very long ago primitive hunter-gatherers, smeared in bear fat and clay, might have moved through those hills.

Yet when summoning 12,000 years of social history as a 2-hour public art event, choices of representation and editing must be made, leading to the question, what is my role in this endeavor? Avery Gordon pins the issue down well: “In what fields does field-work occur? How precisely, is a garrulous overdetermined...encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete 'other world' composed by an individual author?”

I first came to San Clemente canyon through my own sexual forays in public space. Yet my tryst was simply an opener to a much longer creative process that writer

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and critic Hilton Als aptly describes: “Desire is an emotion that no artist can control—until it fades and its vapors become part of the story.”

As queer identified, I have personal investment in the fact that the canyon is used by a portion of the gay community. Similarly, having grown up in a rural area where individuals took fighting thoughtless land development into their own hands, I also have great respect for generations that defend open space in San Diego. Having grown up near a reservation, and visited the Kumeyaay communities in San Diego and the Kumiai communities outside of Tijuana, I also am invested in indigenous land use of North America. Each character I have written about I have some personal connection to. Yet it would be insincere to claim myself as a representative of any of these groups. Similar to the research of David Serlin in *Touching Histories*, the project is not “a campaign to recover a marginal or obscure figure in order to resurrect his or her importance and thus reshuffle the hierarchies of value that constitute historical knowledge.” My goal for Parking Lot Park isn't to advertise a cultural phenomena or to tout it as a gay rights, indigenous rights, or ecological issue, but to sensually address these forces within philosopher Raymond William's framework of residual, dominant, and emergent threads that form the landscape that we both inherited and are producing. I hope to produce a work that bears similarity to how one of my favorite texts, *Ordinary Affects*, has been described as “an idiosyncratic map of connections between a series of singularities.”

When presenting the project of Parking Lot Park at the Australian National University's Affective Habitus conference, an environmental critic recommended to me that I should facilitate a conversation between Wyatt and the park ranger. The proposal

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was repulsive: my job is not to serve as a mediator. My role is to slough off layers of dust to allow the song of the place to be perceived more vibrantly.

**AN UNEXPECTED MESSAGE**

June 21, 2014

As conversations between the parks council developed, more voices came to the fore. I received an e-mail:

*Hi Kate

I read the minutes of your last meeting. They are posted on the bulletin board in the park to answer your last question. I see your getting stiff resistance to Wyatt. Maybe if the one station has cyclists, hikers, couples (having sex or not), people eating lunch, picnics, people taking pictures, people oil painting, nature walks, bird watchers, rangers, police and Wyatt the cruiser but not the focus. It will tell the story of people who use the park without highlighting cruisers. I don't think they will approve it with the focus on cruisers. My park friend thinks it will anger the rangers and they will really crack down on cruisers and try to remove us completely. Which sucks because most cruisers are very discreet and no one would ever really know about it. Keep on fighting! I’ll be looking for the next meetings minutes!

Namaste,
John*

**FREE SPEECH vs. LEAVE NO TRACE**

Perhaps the public project of Parking Lot Park was trampling upon a complex ecology of social interactions that I had never considered. Perhaps I was undermining a don't ask don't tell, leave no trace, approach to formal and informal land management.

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Pack it in, pack it out! The taxidermied rat terrarium interpretive sign asking for visitors to respect complex ecological balances, took on a new meaning.

During advising sessions with a representative from the ACLU and a first amendments lawyer with California Lawyers for the Arts, it was confirmed that the censorship of the project was indeed illegal. David Loy, an ACLU lawyer stated:

In granting or denying a permit, the government (or any of its officials or employees) may not discriminate against speech based on its content or viewpoint. To deny the permit “on the basis of the ideas or views expressed” in your project violates the First Amendment.” Long Beach Area Peace Network v. City of Long Beach, 574 F.3d 1011, 1024 (9th Cir. 2009) Second, to discuss the history of certain illegal acts does not encourage illegal activities, but even if it did, the “mere tendency of speech to encourage unlawful acts is not a sufficient reason for banning it.” Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition, 535 U.S. 234, 253(2002).12

Though it was enervating to learn that my case had supportive legal precedent, leaning on this dry reality seemed like a last resort. Forcing the issue was perhaps akin to Tilted Arc debates, where the artists' modernist vision trumped all: a blunt graft onto an already complex terrain in the name of “public art.” On the other hand, by white washing the project into a palatable Disney ride was even more troubling. These two options seemed like the opposite end of the spectrum, but meeting someplace in tepid middle ground was equally undesirable.

Around August 2014, a resolution was finally achieved by re-proposing to the parks that the story of Wyatt would be played from within the private interior space of a parked vehicle. This proposal was accepted, satisfying concerns of the parks administration by protecting unsuspecting participants from the potential trauma of Wyatt's licentious tales, and satisfying my concerns by better situating Wyatt's story within the cultural setting of his land use practices. All thanks to a little agonism.

It was the first day in the canyon to test to sound installation. Finally the work came alive, the sounds of the stories floating through the oak branches.

As we were carrying the boat battery, inverter, speaker cones, and amp back to the car, we heard a voice coming from a parked truck:

“Excuse me.”

“Oh no” I thought, my prejudices rising. “After all of these close encounters with the third kind this is the first cruiser interaction in the park. Maybe he knows who we are and is going to yell at us for exposing them. Or proposition us.”

“Excuse me.”

I turned around. A bearded man, two hams of forearms crossed on the window ledge of his pick-up.

He's staring quizzically. His eyes bright in a broad, warm face.

“What are you doing with all of that stuff?”

“Oh. We're doing a sound project, we're testing out our equipment.”

“Really? I was wondering if that's what was going on! What are you guys doing out here? I mean this is kind of crazy, I've just never seen anybody out here doing field sound recording. I mean, I used to do it all the time.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. In the 80's I was going into Malaysia, in the deep jungle. I'd spend months out there. I don't go back anymore though, it got too sad. Yeah. That's unusual you know, to find you guys out here. I mean, a lot of people think about documenting their
environment with visuals, but a lot less with sound. What kind of equipment are you using?”

“A Marantz an omni directional mic.”

“Oh yeah? Huh. Do you ever use a parabolic dish?

“Nope.”

“Well I had one of these dishes custom made from a guy in England. Gosh he's probably not even alive any more. This dish, I'd take it all over the world with me. I mean, this thing was so powerful. If I were using it, I could point I towards those houses up there and I would be able to hear their conversations. Pretty amazing.”

Russell sweeps his hands towards the duplexes that rim the canyon. I hear bare feet on carpeting, marinating chicken, 6:00 news. According to conversations with Wyatt, if we were in the 1980's, when the cruising was most active, perhaps we could also hear the neighbor's voices echoing across the canyon, “Stop it! We know what you're doing!”

“So you've never used a parabolic dish before?”

Sam responds, “No, I'm not interested in isolating only certain sounds in an environment. I'm more interested in trying to get a pan-perspective sense of the space.”

“Really? Huh. Well what kind of recordings are you playing out of the speakers?”

“Recordings of the park.”

“Really? So you're doing field recordings of the canyon? That must be hard to isolate the sounds of the highway from everything else. You hear it all the time here. I hear it so much that sometimes I forget it exists.”

“Well, we are actually trying to get recordings of the highway because we're interested in it as a part of the space too.”

“Huh. That's interesting. Well, you know, my goal when I was doing field recording was to always try to go to places that were unspoiled. Deep into the jungles of Malaysia.
Crazy though, how quickly everything would change. You'd come back the next year and they would all be wearing t-shirts. The people there, they were more in touch with nature, they didn't think of themselves as being separate from the animals. And everybody has an animal name. So they asked me what my name is. Russell. Which comes from the word fox originally. And none of them knew what a fox was. And so I had to explain it to them, they are these small angry dogs with red fur. And so that was the name they gave me. Which is actually kind of a good fit for me.”

He smiled through his scarlet beard.

“I would take my dish there, and go out into the jungle. I was always looking for the bush turkey. They are these crazy creatures, have you heard of them?”

I shook my head.

“Well I was out there in the jungle with a guide. You really needed a guide, I mean they were basically the difference between life or death. And I'm looking around for these bush turkeys. They do this thing, you know because they're kind of lazy. They make these big piles of debris, that start composting, and heat up. And they use these compost piles to incubate their eggs. So every now and then you come across the turkeys with their heads stuck in those big piles, snuffling around. And so I'm searching for one of these bush turkeys, really focused. And the guide keeps tugging on my arm. And I'm like, 'I'm busy!' but the guy keeps tugging on my arm and finally I look over and he's pointing down and the bird is right below my feet! I had been so focused on hunting that I didn't realize she was right below me.”

Russell barks a laugh. Dusk sifts over the canyon. Sam and I look at each other. Again my prejudices about how people related to the canyon were disrupted. What were the odds of encountering a field recording artist cruising in the park, who was also engaged with the complications of developed landscapes? Russell was the bush turkey under our
feet the whole time. It's a relief to be talking so congenially but on the other hand it's getting dark and we still haven't tested the work.

“So great to meet you. Give us your e-mail, if you're interested, we can keep in touch about the event.”

“Oh sure, I'd love that. Where are you going to do it?”

“Here.”

“Wow, I'd love to come. Funny to run into you guys, when I saw you two come up out of the woods with all this equipment. I was just sitting here in the truck listening to Nina Simone.”

TOUCHING: CORE SAMPLES AND TIDE POOLS

“As walking, talking, and gesticulating creatures,” Tim Ingold states, “human beings create lines everywhere they go.” What can we learn from the physical quality of these lines we make? What marks have left deep valleys? Borders? Pitter-patters? Striations? Ruptures? Solitary Indents? Or, what does the absence of a line imply? In the Great Acceleration, as climate change biologist Will Steffen refers to the 1950's and 1960's, human surface treatment of San Clemente Canyon produced an array of markings far subtler than other landforms swept up in the rush, due to it's legal designations as Open Space.

Instead of being incorporated into the modernist vision of California highway planning, San Clemente Canyon instead became a refuge, a holdout, and a pleasant vista. From the vantage of one's car window or suburban home, the unmarred sweep of sycamore and oak may appear to be “untouched” yet in fact the open space has been handled for centuries. How can we relate differently to our environments and ourselves

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by considering how we have touched it? I'm interested in the notion of mark making coming directly from the seductions of the hand, and also from larger scale patterns of human movement- whether they are nomadic, in the case of the Kumeyaay woman Yoli, national, in the case of the newly Mexican Rancher Clemente, or city wide, in the case of highway developer Jacob Dekema.

I am, for better or for worse, as described by J.P. Gorin, a schoolmarm and a sensualist. In both the spatial organization and written narratives of Parking Lot Park, I have tried to strike a balance between these tendencies by using storytelling that incites a somatic, gestural response instead of imparting “knowledge” of the landscape through straight historical recounting. This impulse is in keeping again with David Serlin's Touching Histories, who questions how we could relate differently, either together or individually, “if we regard touch as a psychic, experiential, and epistemological category through which subjective understandings of one's body and one's self in the world are represented, refracted and made flesh?” Michael Taussig continues upon this thread stating, “the art of sensuous immediacy is so valuable as an alternate form of knowledge.” The origin myth erotics of the shaping of the canyon featured in the Drive-in Theater video Sam and I have made follows this approach.

In Will Steffen's 2011 essay, The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical Perspectives, he argues the global-scale influence of humans has lead us from the Holocene to a new geological epoch in Earth history. If extending this geological perspective, the human signature, though it's implications are profound, is simply another sedimentary layer. In a way, my project serves as a core sampling of the anthropocene,

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14 Serlin 162
15 Taussig, Michael T. I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2011. 50
drawn from one of the fastest accelerating (and ecologically compromised) regions of the world.

Bowled by the torqueing of tectonic plates and river erosion, and currently sheltered by concrete, San Clemente Canyon has always served as a collecting point of the anthropocene: a tide pool that catches the detritus of land use. From a geographic perspective, the institution of California is so young, that plumbing these layers to trace, feel, and map its various textures is more feasible than in an older region where the socioecological strata has had longer to mingle, disintegrate, and compound.

HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

The spot where Buffalo-Calf-Road-Woman counted her coup has long since been plowed under. A ranch now covers it. But the memory of her deed will last as long as there are Indians. This is not a fairy tale, but it sure is a legend.17

-Told by Rachel strange owl, Birney Montana, with the assistance of two or three others.

Though told in plain narrative, the ending lines of Rachel Strange Owl's account of a land rights battle preceding Custer's Last Stand opens a world of complex dynamics of time, territory, and social history. Yet she clearly states: this is not a fairy tale. In order for her story to become myth, her people would need to disappear, to dissolve simply into monuments. Yet the recording of her story took place on a Cheyenne reservation, a direct product of the American Indian wars she recounts. Storytelling can be seductive- it can lull us into a place of bedtime comfort, where the characters are always “over there.” I'm

interested in storytelling such as Rachel Strange Owl's that asks us to reckon with the present.

“To write a history of the present,” declares Avery Gordon, “requires stretching toward the horizon of what cannot be seen with ordinary clarity yet.”\(^{18}\) She goes on to state that this form of history writing requires an awareness of what is not ordinarily visible: a glance where the “transparent and the shadowy confront each other.”\(^{19}\) Quite literally summoning the shadows, I chose to host Parking Lot Park in the canyon when dusk edges into nighttime. By tamping down the bright stare of the day, the goal is to create a space where by avoiding risk of sprained ankles or perhaps even ghosts, visitors are forced to slow down as they move through the trails.

My idea is not new: as the ghost of Hamlet's father emerges from the black- so too does the Ghost of Christmas Past pays a midnight visit to Ebenezer. As Virginia Woolf sets Mrs. Ramsey's passage into death in a seaside house quieted by night, so too do Steinbeck's Oakies strike west and leave their home to be overtaken by shadows and slinking creatures. In all of these cases, through juxtaposing images of entropic darkness, the preciousness, the precariousness of the hinged present arises. Again, Gordon puts it well: “only through summoning shadows in the 'unequivocal accusation of the real', can one approach the intermingling of fact, fiction, and desire as it shapes us and the public knowledge we create.”\(^{20}\)

Employing vernacular tones of the nature walk, story circle, and drive in theater, hopefully the participant can have enough footholds to access the work from a multitude of perspectives. How does someone looking for public sex relate to poison ivy writhing through trails? How might butchered cows have looked strewn throughout the canyon?

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during the hide industry? How does the bedrock take shape when pounded for years with acorn mush? Through storytelling I have tried to incite these imaginative speculations. Accumulatively, an exquisite corpse can emerge: vibrating and ghostly: present. These goals align with philosopher Allen Carlson's “engagement view” of environmental aesthetics, who states, “accounts that emphasize imagination help us to understand our aesthetic responses to everything from our exploitation of environments to our smelling and tasting of them.”

I'm interested in the exquisite corpse potential of the choreography of Parking Lot Park: how differently will someone's experience of moving through the canyon be if they encounter the story of Yoli the Kumeyaay harvester and move on to the alienated 21st century sexual foray of Kate and Ben? If they first encounter the story of Wyatt's sexual forays and move on to Clemente's cow butchering? In some ways, self-navigated mash up is actually more akin to the process of memory relation. Michael Taussig's ruminations on the power of the field work journal sheds light on this potential: “we are bound to another time that, like Proust's *memoire involontaire*, unexpectedly opens onto new worlds when two slabs of time, two quite separate moments of time, are for one reason or another juxtaposed.”

Of course, all of these central narratives that Sam and I present will not be the same traces that other people pick up on in the canyon- it would be impossible to force-feed these layers. Perhaps participants will simply be more captivated by the sweep of the lights of the highway at night, or with the opportunity to peruse the trails with their friends. This is what makes the project an experiment, we have no idea how people will respond to our facilitation of the space.

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As my collaborator Sam had described to Russell in the canyon, the aim of the project of Parking Lot Park isn't to isolate one aspect of the environment- but to approach it's many sociobiological elements as tendons, muscle tissue, and nerve endings within a complex body. Ultimately, this is a speculative, exploratory gesture: instead of forcing the canyon back into the moderated space of a guided museum tour, we have designed the sound walk so people move through it at their own will. Perhaps people will become distracted or get lost, but they will choose their own path.

LIFE FINDS A WAY

Before resolution with the parks was reached for the Wyatt story conundrum, I contacted Russell, asking if we could meet another time in the park to discuss the complications of the project. After explaining my concerns to him, he said, “I had a feeling it would be about that. But don't you worry. You go ahead. People will always find ways to connect. If it's not here, it will be someplace else. If it dies down, it'll come back again. It's a force beyond you and me. There's nothing you can do to stop life.”
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JACOB


MARIAN


Bear, Deron, and Clark Kate. "Interview with Deron Bear, Grandson of Marian Bear." Personal interview. 2 May 2014.


KATE


WYATT


PART III: Process, Influences


