“Welcome Home”: Performing Place, Community, and Identity in the New West Bluegrass Music Revival

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"WELCOME HOME": PERFORMING PLACE, COMMUNITY, AND
IDENTITY IN THE NEW WEST BLUEGRASS MUSIC REVIVAL

by

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B.A., Bowling Green State University, 1993.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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"Welcome Home": Performing Place, Community, and Identity in the New West Bluegrass Music Revival

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has been approved for the Department of Sociology

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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In this study, I examine the social context surrounding the revival of bluegrass music in the New American West. Drawing on six years of participant observation of bluegrass musical performances and festival settings and interviews with over a hundred bluegrass festival participants, I explain the underlying draw of these festivals to residents of and travelers to the American West. I contend that bluegrass festivalgoers identify with the traditional imagery and symbolism of bluegrass music as a way to cope with and respond to social and cultural modernization. I argue that participants in bluegrass music and festival culture in the New West use the festival experience as a way to perform an alternative sense of place, identity, and community not readily available in their hometowns and communities. They fuse the symbolism of Old Appalachia in traditional bluegrass music with the imagery of the Old West to mediate the oppositional tensions that they experience between tradition and postmodernity. Participants use the festival site as a space in which they can reclaim and reconnect with a slower, simpler, and perceivably more authentic style of living that they find increasingly difficult to create in their home environments.
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CHAPTER I:  
THE ROAD TO TELLURIDE: "ROAD HOME"

As our caravan of vehicles left the Front Range, the familiar sights of Starbucks, stoplights, and sprawling rows of townhouses gave way to steep mountain canyons, wide plateau vistas, and quiet, little mountain towns. This was the land of rodeos, sprawling ranchland, and cattle crossings. Driving along Route 285 through Bailey, South Park, Salida, and Buena Vista (pronounced “Bunah” vista by locals), I followed not too closely behind Caleb and Kristina’s loaded down pick-up that oddly resembled the teetering and tightly packed car the Beverly Hillbillies drove to California or perhaps the junk packed truck of Sanford and Son. Sleeping bags, backpacks, tent bags, tiki torches, banjo and guitar cases, camping chairs, and pop-up canopies all covered with several blue and green plastic tarps, which by this time had unraveled and flapped violently in the wind, filled the back of their weighted down vehicle. With large canopy poles stretching the length of his truck bed and pointing over the cab of his truck like a witching stick toward our final destination of Telluride, we sauntered through the vestiges of the West of Old to a Mecca of the New West.

Seven hours into our trek, we wound down the spiraling red rock valley, past the rustic town of Sawpit. Making the last sweeping turn into the Telluride Valley floor, a massive waterfall sandwiched between two snow dusted mountain peaks, its signature sight came into view. “Whoa.” As the magnificent and whoa-inspiring sight unfolded in front of us, the carload of conversation and the radio blaring the latest bootleg show from the Yonder Mountain String Band came to a
peculiar halt. I slowly turned the stereo’s volume back to a tolerable level as the vehicle slowed and its passengers regained their temporarily suspended voices. As the car crept to an imperceptible pace behind the snaking line of SUVs, pick-up trucks, and Subaru wagons, the familiar orange signs began to appear alerting drivers of the proper road to take for the various festival parking and camping areas.

FESTIVAL PARKING AHEAD.

ILLIUM CAMPING NEXT RIGHT.

TOWN PARK CAMPING.

MUST HAVE CAMPING PASS TO ENTER TOWN PARK.

In striking contrast to the vast, open, and largely unpopulated sights we had just witnessed, the growing row of cars heading for downtown Telluride were channeled into several distinct lines, preparing for what initially seemed like a Gestapo checkpoint. “Can I see your papers? They seem to be in order...”, the conversation played out in my head as I scanned the car for potential contraband. However, this conversation too came to a peculiar halt when I discovered that Checkpoint Charlie was dressed in a Tie Dye shirt, Birkenstock sandals, and orange tinted Smith sunglasses. “Whew.” With a laid back style that was one part California surfer, one part Grateful Deadhead, and one part Internet techie:

“Heeeey there. How’s everybody doin’?
Where you comin’ from? Boul-der? Coool!
Everybody got your tickets handy?
Oooh... You guys are in Town Park?
Right on! All-right... Straight ahead.
Have fun!!”
As we passed through the initial ticket checkpoint in route to our final destination, the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, we entered a completely different world than the one- actually two- we had left behind earlier that day.

As we pulled the caravan into campground, we were greeted by a host of campers who had arrived earlier in the week and by that point, had fully lived in the emergent tent community for days. Passing through the well-established camps, we made our way down a bumpy dirt path through the maze of haphazardly thrown tents and shelters, complete with tie-dye tapestries and rainbow windsocks hanging from the trees to symbolically announce camp entrances. The clunky plunk of banjos and the soft booming of upright basses could be heard from all directions and accompanied the crooning and slightly off-pitch mélange of vocals trying ever so hard to find their harmony. An avid banjo player, I could tell that Caleb was contemplating stopping his vehicle mid course to join in the rather lively rendition of “Whiskey Before Breakfast” that echoed through our dust laden vehicles as we sauntered back through the primitive camping area. A bit disoriented by the seeming lack of organization to the camp, we ran into a friend heading to the bathroom who we were expecting to meet:

“Hey Erndog. Have you seen Goldhammer?”
“Yeah, he’s down past the Mash Tent right before you get to Flamingo”
“Cool, Man. Where are you camped.”
“I’m on the other side of the camp. Right next to Telluride Tom. You should see a big row of flags- I’m right across from that in the white V.W. camper. Just look for the Disco Ball and Lava Lamp.”
“So you brought the Love Bus this year, Erndog?” I inquired.
“Of course! How could I not? Stop by later. I’m cooking up a big feast. Salmon fillets and beef brisket. Y’all are welcome.”
“Thanks Erndog, I’ll stop by in a bit.”
“Welcome home, man...”
A Welcome Home

As we finally brought the caravan to a halt, and located the “Daves’ Camp”— hosted by three friends named Dave and our home for the duration of the festival—we unloaded our coolers, tarps, tents, backpacks, instruments, boxes of food, beer, jugs of corn whiskey, and portable stoves and wedged ourselves into the remaining open spaces surrounding their camp. During the several trips back and forth from temporarily parked vehicles, I was showered with several more greetings of “welcome home!” from passers by. As I crossed the bridge into the primitive portion of the campground, children had already built makeshift forts underneath the bridge that would serve as their imaginary playground for the next several days. Before long, howls of “FESSTIVALLLL!!” rang throughout the campground originating from the direction of the Mash Tent.

In an attempt to remedy several hours in the car without a bathroom break I headed to the row of green and blue plastic portable toilets. Before I actually made my way down to the porta jon, I poked my head into a particularly festive camp to witness the commotion. A crowd of thirty or forty men and women of various ages was hovering around an enormous, fruit punch stained cooler. Holding their tiny plastic cups in the air, I realized they were all sharing in what I would soon discover was a time-honored ritual. Without my direct request, an unknown figure, a rum soaked baba dressed in a woman’s one-piece bathing suit, thrust a paper cup into my hands. “RUMBALLS!!” he shouted directly into my face, slightly slurring his words as he encouraged me to empty the cup. As I downed the mixture of fruit punch and the rum soaked selection of fruit at the
bottom of my cup, he directed me to the enormous blue cooler, where I could find an ample supply of the ritual beverage of the festival homecoming.

Before I got too carried away with the festivities, I was distracted by a strange group of men, instruments in hand, all adorned with particularly gaudy women’s dresses. Along with Mr. Rumball, I soon came to realize they were dressed in preparation for the evening’s Freebox Fashion Show, another Telluride tradition. Each year before the start of the festival, the well initiated festivalgoers walk into downtown Telluride and scavenge the town’s “free box,” a large donation bin with everything from swimsuits, to old skis and snowboards, to men’s sport coats and women’s power suits, to wedding and prom dresses. They create makeshift costumes to prominently display during the evening’s festivities, which usually take place after everyone is primed after their downing of the rumballs.

After my long overdue visit to the Chem Can, I returned back to camp to empty the rest of my car and begin assembling my new home. There, my groups of friends and I nestled in for the evening and prepared ourselves for what would be a marathon of music over the next four days. Greeted with more spirited good tidings of “welcome home” as I wandered throughout the campsite site, I began to think about its dual meaning. On the surface, it was an implicit message that we had “arrived” to our destination. On another level it was a sign that we were indeed entering a quite welcome and comfortable place to call home for the extended weekend.
Newgrass Revival

For bluegrass fans in the New West, few roads have more mystique than the breathtakingly scenic route through the San Juan Mountains into the box canyon of Telluride, Colorado. Roughly ten thousand “festivarians” travel each year and make the eight-hour-plus pilgrimage from areas across the Front Range of Colorado’s Rocky Mountains and beyond. The road itself is symbolic of the physical and mystical transition from the “real world” into “Brigadoon,” as one festivarian1 referred to it. Passing through the sleepy Western towns of Montrose, Ridgway, Placerville, and Sawpit into the Telluride Valley, travelers traverse remnants and artifacts of the Old West—ramshackle mining shacks, tumbleweed, historic saloons, and scarred mining landscapes— and cross over into the meeting ground of the old and the new. Situated in a box canyon, one road in and out of town makes Telluride more of an ultimate destination than a stopping over point on the way someplace else. It is literally a “road home” (which, appropriately, is the name of a song made popular by the Telluride festival favorites Strength in Numbers) The steep and dramatic canyon walls and mountain backdrop create a cozy, physical shelter from the ills and problems of the world. Taking comfort that they are miles away from “civilization,” festival participants seek refuge in this once defunct silver mining town that has become the ultimate playhouse for the performance of New West culture.

In this study, I embark upon an ethnography that explores a particular set of performances of New West culture staged in bluegrass music and festival sites across the American West. Throughout the Front Range and beyond, fans both old

1 A “festivarian” is a term participants use to refer to a festivalgoer or festival participant.
and new are soaking up the Appalachian acoustic string band sound made popular in the 1920s, 30s and 40s by the likes of Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and the Stanley Brothers. After decades of eking a marginal existence on the fringes of country and western music, the past decade has propelled bluegrass and old time acoustic string band music to the forefront of American musical consciousness. Exposed to contemporary mass audiences through recent feature films like *O’ Brother Where Art Thou* and *Songcatcher*, Bluegrass and related forms of American roots music have secured a solid reading on the American cultural radar and are increasingly prominent in the rituals and traditions of the New West.

What explains this growing fascination with bluegrass and old time music in the New West? Why have New Westerners resuscitated these once floundering musical traditions? And why, especially along the Rocky Mountain Front Range, are people flocking to bluegrass and acoustic music festivals and donning their mandolins, acoustic guitars, fiddles, and banjos to celebrate the American music of old? This explosion of interest in old time and traditional forms of bluegrass music is far more than merely a passing fad or fashion. Instead, this trend signifies a larger cultural and social movement responding to the ills of modernization and urbanization and the subsequent decline of community life in the early 21st century. In this study, I explore this cultural movement by linking the symbol of “bluegrass” and representations of the life and culture in Old Appalachia with the increasingly mobile, transient, and “placeless” populations of the New West. I situate the contemporary bluegrass revival within a long history of cultural
appropriation of the “bluegrass” symbol as a site of rurality, simplicity, community, and authenticity and explain how the growing festival culture in the New West uses this symbolism to organize the festival experience.

In this study, I examine the growth of bluegrass music and festival life in the contemporary American West, a specific set of performances of regional culture that scholars have termed the “New West” (Riebsame 1997). I explore how participants use the festival as a site through which they enact their longings for place, community, and “authentic” personal identity. I argue that the growth of festival culture in the New West signifies a novel brand of postmodern community that participants craft in response to changes in their lived environments, specifically larger scale social changes that undermine community in its traditional forms. They identify with bluegrass music as an authentic symbol of a simpler, easier, and more traditional way of Appalachian style folk life and, much like their 1960s folk revivalist counterparts, see their participation as a way to reclaim values and ways of life deemed threatened by mass society and culture.

As such, this study is both an ethnography of bluegrass music and festival settings and an exploration of the emergent performances of New West life and culture. In the chapters that follow, I present a textual analysis of the historical context of the New West festival movement and a deeper, ethnographic analysis of the bluegrass festival camp as a site of place, community, and identity performance.

In chapter five, Bluegrass as Source and Symbol: Place and Memory in Bluegrass Music, I link the emergence of bluegrass with the social, cultural, and environmental changes taking place in 1920s, 1930s, and 40s Appalachia. I
construct an historical narrative of "bluegrass" as a cultural symbol by examining the bluegrass revival of the 60s, and its incorporation into popular culture to better understand its contemporary use and appropriation in a New West context. I first trace the history of bluegrass music to its traditional roots and explore key musical and lyrical themes articulated and performed by early bluegrass string bands and continue to be performed to this day. After defining my use of the concept in the context of this chapter, I examine "place" as it is constructed in bluegrass and traditional Appalachian music through a brief historical analysis of the cultural and social context surrounding the music's emergence. I explore the various ways that traditional strains of bluegrass construct a sense of place through an analysis of a selection of traditional bluegrass songs. I situate these songs in their original social context to explain how residents of Appalachia connected with the music when the region was experiencing rapid and profound social and cultural change. I read the history of bluegrass music and the emergence of "bluegrass" as a site and symbol of Appalachian cultural memory that provided a source of comfort and solace to those uprooted or displaced from their home as a result of economic conditions facing the regions' residents at the turn of the twentieth century. Through a mix of ethnographic and interpretive analysis of the New West bluegrass revival, I argue that contemporary listeners construct and appropriate bluegrass as a symbol of authentic, simple life and use it as a screen on which they project glorified versions of the past, criticism of the present, and hopeful visions of the future. The rekindled interest in bluegrass and traditional American "roots" music in the American West can thus be linked to
the well-established sense of history, tradition, and place that many individuals find lacking in the quickly urbanizing region.

In the following three chapters, I walk the reader from start to finish through the bluegrass festival focusing primarily on the festival camp as a site of place, community, and identity performance. In Chapter Six, "Welcome Home"; Building Place in the Festival Camp, I examine the growth of bluegrass and acoustic music festivals in the American West and situate the festival camp as a site of place performance. I first describe the process through which portable festival camps emerge, grow, and flourish into vibrant “vernacular villages.”

When building the typical bluegrass festival camp, participants progress through a series of distinct phases in its development. Before the festival, participants spend several months planning their campsite and the supplies that they will need to build it. After a pilgrimage to the festival site, campers wait in line outside of the festival gate hours, days, and in some cases weeks before the start of the festival itself. When the gates to the festival campsite open (usually a day or more before the festival), participants engage in the land rush during which festivalgoers are let into the campground en masse by the event staff. Once campers have secured adequate space for their tents, tarps, and vehicles, they begin to set-up their campsites. Once the campsites have been constructed and the mass of attendees arrives, festivalgoers begin to emplace the campground. In this section, I narrate in greater depth the process through which participants reconfigure open festival campsite spaces into intimate places by focusing on their distinct architectural and spatial forms. I explain how the specific forms that emerge in these camps reflect
the values and goals of their members and provide a “welcome home” for the mobile festival visitors.

After attendees set up their camps to create a village atmosphere at the start of the festival, the remaining time is spent engaging in the various activities of the festival site, including listening to the musical main stage performances, engaging in campsite activities and rituals, perusing the food and vendor courts, or participating in other scheduled or non-scheduled events or activities taking place throughout the festival site. In Chapter Seven, “The Portable Community: Modernization and Mobility in Bluegrass Festival Life,” I examine the various performances of community at the festival and in the festival camp. I explore three primary motives participants express when explaining their involvement in bluegrass festival life. Festivalgoers articulate a consistent vocabulary of intimacy, inclusion, and simplicity that they use to describe their participation in the bluegrass festival. As a form of situated action, participants position their involvement as driven by a quest for intimate community, open and equal social relations, simple living, and authentic cultural expression; elements they found in short supply in their daily lives.

In Chapter Eight, “The Festival World is So Much Better than the Real World”: Performing Identity in Festival Spaces, I explore how the festival camp provides an alternative space outside of “real life” in which participants perform identity. I end with a description of the process of tearing down the camp and returning home and explain how this cements participants’ distinction between “real world” and “festival world.” Drawing from Victor Turner’s (1969) notions
of communitas and liminality in ritual pilgrimage and rites of passage, I explain how the often rural, isolated physical geography of the festival site and the ritual nature of the pilgrimage to and from the site provide a symbolic break from daily life. Rules, roles, and responsibilities are left behind in the “real world” as festival participants perform a world of play, fantasy, and carnival in the “festival world.” This separation allows festival participants to create places *sui generis* that more closely reflect their values and lifestyles create festival traditions to which they felt a more personal connection than any existing places or communities. By leaving the real world behind along with its interactional structures of constraint, I examine how festival participants use the festival space to perform their “real” selves through perceivably more authentic performances of identity. They describe the festival site as a place where they can “be themselves” and “be real” by stripping away the markers of their customary social positions.

I then describe the final stage of the festival. After the last main-stage performance of the festival, and as the picking circles afterward begin to thin, festivalgoers begin a process of *withdrawal* in which they tend to draw into themselves, remove themselves from the social activity, and prepare for their departure from the mobile tent city. Residents of the portable camp then begin the process of *breaking camp*, dismantling their temporary shelters, and packing their vehicles for the ride back to “real life.” As soon as the tent stakes and blue plastic tarps begin to disappear, these informal campsite architects begin to plan again for the next festival or perhaps the following year to ensure that their shelter is stronger, decorations more extensive, and accoutrements greater in number.
In the next chapter, I provide a brief history of bluegrass music and festival culture. I explore the progression of bluegrass music through the mid twentieth century and explore the circulation and appropriation of the symbol “bluegrass” up to the present day. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, bluegrass music spread beyond the boundaries of Appalachian South and industrialized Midwest when bluegrass fans and musicians carried the music further West (Carney 1974). A growing number of urban fans influenced by the folk music revival of the 1960s “rediscovered” bluegrass as an authentic expression of anti-modernization and resistance to cultural change. As the bluegrass symbol gained cultural current in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, it was increasingly appropriated as a symbol of rural and often backwards country life. As it is appropriated in a contemporary context, specifically in the New American West, I explore the symbolism of “bluegrass” and how its rural imagery is used to organize participants’ festival experiences.
CHAPTER II:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLUEGRASS MUSIC AND CULTURE

As a distinct genre, bluegrass music grew from a melding of musical forms circulating within the Appalachian mountain region around the turn of the Twentieth century. A novel form at its inception, what came to be known as bluegrass by fans and performers borrowed elements from a diverse selection of traditional Appalachian musical and cultural influences and blended these with popular forms including blues, jazz, swing, and gospel. Growing out of these influences, bluegrass music became a novel form of “traditional” American string band music that was “invented” and flourished in the Appalachian region throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s and continues to be played and performed across the world. Pioneered by Bill Monroe, Ralph and Carter Stanley, and Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, bluegrass is played primarily on acoustic instruments, including the five-string banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar, and upright bass (which are sometimes accompanied by the Hawaiian resonator slide guitar or Dobro). Vocal arrangements include three and four-part vocal harmonies that are characterized by an artificially high and sometimes nasal tone. The characteristic bluegrass sound consisted of “the extremely fast ensemble playing of acoustic stringed instruments with the individuals instruments—including the human voice used much like an instrument—exchanging solo choruses” (Peterson, 1997, 213). Often shifting and circling around a single microphone, soloing performers would propel their instruments to the forefront of the group to ensure their sound stood above the backing rhythm of the others. Much like a jazz combo, each player
takes center stage during the solo performance, which features his or her unique improvisation of the melody line.

Before the emergence of bluegrass, early Appalachian string bands tapped into a large stock of traditional fiddle melodies, ballads, and lyrical conventions that were brought to the region by settlers of Scots-Irish heritage. These immigrants brought instruments and melodies from their homeland in the British Isles and passed along the traditional oral folk repertoire through familial networks and community performances in the Appalachian highlands. Often these musicians learned the large stock of traditional songs and melodies from their mother or father, or perhaps a fiddle playing relative who would perform these songs at barn raisings, community festivals, church socials, pie suppers, picnics, or barn dances (Rosenberg, 1985). Over time these aural traditions became firmly established in Appalachia and emerged as staples of the region’s social and cultural life. Isolated from the cultural influences of the burgeoning city life, many of the traditional musical styles, songs, and melodies remained relatively intact and sheltered from the modernizing influences of urban culture.

As commercial and economic development seeped into the once isolated mountain communities, the region’s people were introduced to social and cultural forces that forever changed their social and cultural worlds. In the early part of the Twentieth century, Appalachia became a hotbed of development and mineral extraction. The mining operations and textile mills in the larger regional centers pulled economically strapped landowners and farm workers down from the highland areas in search of employment. Rail lines were also built through
existing villages and hollows to link the regional centers of commerce and to haul out the buried riches that lie beneath the mountain soil. Both of these developments introduced city and hill country residents to previously unfamiliar cultures and influences. The chants of work songs of African-American rail workers began to ring through the mountain highlands as they laid the first rail lines into remote communities and hollows. The automobile and other forms of mass transit brought traveling minstrel and blues musicians to the region and introduced new and unfamiliar syncopated rhythms and African instruments like the banjo. Over time, these influences mixed and mingled with the existing Appalachian folk traditions to create altogether new musical forms.

Post WWI migration out of Appalachia and the decline in the family farm led many away from their home communities to seek employment in the industrial areas further north and west. With the onset of the Great Depression, musicians would often travel around from place to place for employment and would showcase their musical skills to those who wanted forms of entertainment to distract them from the harsh economic realities of the times. When they couldn’t find stable employment, their musical talents provided a small income that they would otherwise be without. For many, factory or farm work was viewed as a “temporary expedient” when the music jobs played out (Peterson 1997, 111). To supplement their sporadic factory and textile work, these musicians would hire out their skills by playing local dances and house parties at which they could each earn four or five dollars a night. Once these musicians gained experience and notoriety performing, they would often be hired in support...
of traveling comedy or minstrel shows, or perhaps used as advertising entertainment for traveling snake oil salesmen who pitched their herbal tonics or patent medicines. Over time, acts like the Monroe Brothers, Fiddlin’ John Carson and his daughter “Moonshine Kate,” Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, Jimmie Rodgers, and the Carter Family gained notoriety and became sought after by record and radio producers alike. When factory or farm work was sporadic, they would often travel from town to town by automobile and perform fifteen-minute slots at local radio stations, which would then be broadcast throughout the week. Though they would make barely enough money to pay for their food, lodging, and gas money for the next stop on their radio tour, they found that these radio programs were an excellent form of advertisement and that the job of professional performer was far preferable to that of factory or farm laborer.

With the 1920s, the advent of country barn dance radio performances like the National Barn Dance featured on Chicago’s WLS or the Grand Ole Opry hosted on Nashville’s WSM, became popular forms of entertainment. Fifty thousand watt clear channel transmitters pumped the early country music sounds across the country into both the hustle and bustle of the metropolitan city and remote mountain villages and hollows. These weekly programs provided a more stable form of employment for many of the burgeoning professional musicians. Intended initially to appeal to rural, working class audiences, these shows—

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2 The growing popularity of these radio programs also provided a market for traveling musicians to perform on these radio programs or to record tracks in the studio that would then be played throughout the day. As their popularity rose, certain string bands would elicit enough attention to warrant cross-country excursions to perform in front of live studio audiences at radio programs across the country.
described by folklorist Neil Rosenberg (1985) as “the dramatic equivalent of an idealized family ‘get together’”— were crafted as symbols of down home community or extended family gatherings (p.57). Featuring prominent hillbilly string bands and polished semiprofessional musicians, these shows soon caught fire in urban areas, especially among displaced rural émigrés and became nationally recognized as these programs reached network status (Cantwell 1984). This cross-fertilization of mountain and city life provided a market for those city dwellers seeking the strange yet familiar sounds of mountain melodies and ballads. Seeking new markets, record producers began seeking out the authentic mountain sounds of Appalachian fiddlers and string band ensembles to attract the growing number of displaced rural refugees who joined the droves of immigrants and working classes in the industrial workforce congregating in cities further north (Peterson 1997; Rosenberg 1985). This growing market for rural Appalachian vernacular musics, then referred to as “hillbilly” or “old time” by record producers and radio hosts, referenced the diverse and wide ranging mixture of religious, dance, popular, and folk musics that began to seep slowly into national consciousness. Though this music appealed mostly to blue collar workers, farm families, and other members of the rural working class in its formative years, many in the upper crust of metropolitan culture loathed the growing popularity of hillbilly music, “seeing it as a constant reminder of the rustic rural past contrasting sharply with the sophisticated and classy urban image to which they aspired” (Peterson 1997, 27). Even though record producers themselves also loathed the painfully “lowbrow” associations of these perceived
culturally backward and “hayseed” musical forms, they found continually that this traditional mountain music was among the most profitable and sought after in their record catalogues and on their radio programs (Peterson, 1997).

In the Fall of 1939, after breaking off his duo performances with his brother Charlie, Bill Monroe brought a new string band lineup to audition at the Grand Ole Opry. Immediately impressed, Monroe and his evolving band—the Blue Grass Boys—secured a permanent spot on the show. However, it wasn’t until the mid 1940s when Monroe (mandolin) cultivated his most notorious lineup featuring Lester Flatt (guitar) and Earl Scruggs (five-string banjo). Unlike anything listeners had heard before, the syncopated three-finger picking style of Scruggs’ banjo playing and the fast, streamlined, and polished ensemble playing of the group propelled Monroe’s band into the limelight. Though no one was calling this music “bluegrass” at the time, the genre as we know it today evolved from this formative line-up. The formal characteristics of the “bluegrass sound” became synonymous with the characteristic template Monroe, Flatt, and Scruggs established in the mid 1940s. Even today, fans, performers, and record and festival producers distinguish between “real” or “traditional” bluegrass and more progressive and modern forms by comparing their closeness to the original Blue Grass Boy mold. It wasn’t until record executives and radio and concert promoters needed a label for this novel form of American string band music that the name “bluegrass” (named for Monroe’s backing band and his native home of Kentucky) gained cultural currency. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the spread of bluegrass music beyond the boundaries of the Appalachian South soon
accelerated when radio transmitters, studio recordings, bluegrass fans, and musicians carried the music elsewhere. Though extremely popular in its day, bluegrass music was eventually eclipsed by the advent of commercialized country music and the electrified sounds of ‘Rock ‘n Roll.’ With the increasingly modernizing post WWII American society, traditional backwoods hillbilly music lost its appeal to the singing cowboy sound. Country Music historian Richard Peterson explains that the image of the hillbilly and cowboy:

both suggest a region of the country and a way of life... both hillbilly and cowboy suggest a self reliant (most often male) child of nature, unfettered by the constraints of urban society... (however) the hillbilly often seemed close to breaking under the combined weight of depressed agricultural prices and the march of industrialization into the rural hinterland... In stark contrast, the cowboy, always serious, alone, and unfettered by communal responsibilities...

thus became “an ambivalent-primitive-loner turned agent-of-civilization.” (Peterson 1997, p. 67, 81-82). During this time of rapid economic growth and Westward urban migration and expansion, the cowboy better matched the emerging American self-concept. The hillbilly signified the backwards, the past, the primitive that modern society was trying to escape. As a result, bluegrass music, though commercially successful, eked out a marginal existence relative to the growing popularity of country and rock and roll music.

As America moved into the tumultuous 1960s, the Vietnam war, civil rights movements, and the unfulfilled promises of modern living led a growing
number of urban fans influenced by the folk music revival to “rediscover” bluegrass as an authentic expression of anti-modernization and resistance to cultural change. Starting with the folk music boom of the 1960s, bluegrass was appropriated increasingly as a symbol of rural American life and the distinct cultural heritage of the Appalachian folk. Folklorist Horace Newcomb explores the uses and functions that these images perform when consumed by people outside of Appalachia. As a “metaphor for what is rural in America,” referring to “hillbilly lifestyle, wherever it happens to exist,” these images explore a “region of the American mind” rather than a specific place or region in American cultural geography... The larger populace has historically used Appalachia (and other rural areas) for that liminal ground on which to criticize its own values, to challenge the ‘acceptable’ way of life with other attitudes” (Newcomb 1980, p. 317). Through musical and popular culture, bluegrass music became associated with simple and often backwards rural life through its portrayal in films like Deliverance and Bonnie and Clyde and through such television programming as The Beverly Hillbillies and Hee Haw. These comedic images symbolized a break, distancing us from a perceivably more primitive time in our nation’s past. Folk revivalists took special meaning from the rural connotations of this early form of authentic American folk music and used the music to recapture value systems and ways of life they felt were fading out of existence. Many revivalists work to preserve these traditional cultures because, in the words of Neil Rosenberg (1985):
Mass media were overwhelming vernacular culture, engulfing folk groups in a homogenous culture which destroyed worthwhile local and regional traditions… They perceived deterioration in the social fabric and sought to halt it. They were cultural conservationists, believing that the greed and thoughtlessness on the part of the powerful had exploited and eroded the delicate patches of ‘small tradition’ which gave the nation its strength (p. 274).

Folk revival revivalists felt not only that they were preserving a unique form of American cultural and musical history but were attempting to reclaim a past and a way of life that was on the brink of extinction from the homogenizing forces of mass urbanization and mass culture.

Expanding upon a steady concert and radio circuit in the late 1950s and 60s the festival became an integral part of larger bluegrass music culture in the 1970s. Carleton Haney’s Roanoke Bluegrass Festival, the first three-day bluegrass festival hosted at Fincastle, Virginia, was modeled after the popular Newport Folk Festival. Citybillies, salt-of-the earth-farmers, and working class mountain folk from around the region arrived, instrument and tent in hand. They built small camps consisting of tents or pull-behind trailers, formed impromptu amateur jam sessions, shared food and conversation, and saw the radio legends of their time. Though other, more commercially successful forms of popular music made their mark through television, radio, and record album sales, many bluegrass artists were shut out of the major markets in the late 1960s and 70s, which forced them to create their own independent systems of production, distribution, and
performance (Fenster 1995) one of which was the bluegrass festival. Similar to the old time fiddlers’ who attended conventions across the upland south in the late 1800s, amateur and professional musicians would arrive at festivals, instrument in hand, to demonstrate their skills and compete for prizes. As the modern bluegrass festival movement grew, the instrument competitions played second fiddle to the well-established main stage radio performers. However, interested in preserving the authentic, traditional performers and their cultures, the festival organizers staged workshops on instrument building, vocal and instrument instruction, cultural and social histories of the music, as well as instruction in traditional forms of dance such as clogging, flatfooting, and contra and square dancing. Additionally, since many of the early fans of the music were also amateur or professional musicians themselves, the informal ensemble jam sessions that would take place in the campgrounds before, during, and after the main stage acts became a signature ritual that set these events apart from the rock and folk festivals of the day.

The success of these initial bluegrass festivals led others to begin promoting their own (Rosenberg 1985). The “extended mobility of the American population” and the migration of residents of the upland South both Northward and Westward created a fertile soil for growth of the early bluegrass festival circuit of the early 1970s. Explaining the growth of bluegrass festivals in the 1970s, Rosenberg (1985) explained that:

A combination of factors lay behind the growing awareness of and attendance at bluegrass festivals. Enthusiastic interest in camping and the
marketing of recreational equipment, including fancy vehicles, had added to the resources of weekend campers. The interstate highway system, begun in 1956, had by the late sixties made it possible to travel long distances with relative ease on limited access highways, and fuel was cheap. This combination of recreational camping and its concomitant technology created a network of private and public recreational facilities catering to tourists on the road.

By the end of the 1970s, the circuit had spread beyond the Appalachian and Midwest regions to include all but scattered portions of the Rocky Mountain’s and Northern Plains (Carney 1974). Shortly thereafter, improvements in transportation, interstate travel, and the appeal of the American West as a refuge from the crowded cities further west and east led promoters and festivalgoers to see the West as a premier setting to host and attend bluegrass festivals. A reflection of this trend is the Rocky Mountain region, which hosts a growing number of summer music festivals (Wolf 1999), many of which have taken on an avowedly bluegrass musical turn.

**The Sociology of Bluegrass**

Beginning with the revival of bluegrass during the folk music boom in the 1960s, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and popular culture scholars began examining the distinctive place of bluegrass music and culture in American folk and popular culture. Scholars from fields as diverse and wide ranging as sociology, folklore studies, and literary criticism have surveyed comprehensively...
bluegrass music and culture (Cantwell 1984; Hill 1980; Rosenberg 1985; Willis 1992), traditional bluegrass music (Price 1975; Wright 1993), as well as more progressive enactments of bluegrass—often referred to as "newgrass\(^3\)" by both listeners and industry leaders (Rosenberg 1992). Others have investigated the geographical roots and dimensions of what is now regarded as the "bluegrass sound" (Carney 1974; 1989). Despite a comprehensive historical treatment of the musical and cultural roots of bluegrass music, the bluegrass sound, and the prominent figures and events characterizing this history, few scholars have examined the social and cultural conditions that gave rise to bluegrass' musical and lyrical imagery. Seldom have scholars examined the social and cultural significance of bluegrass as a symbol of Appalachian life.

A growing body of folklore literature has also traced the evolution and "transformation" of traditional folk musics as they have been revived and reenacted in different contexts, regions and historical eras (see Rosenberg 1993, 1993b). Additionally, scholars have examined multiple facets of the sites of bluegrass performance, production and consumption including: the folk and popular elements characterizing bluegrass musical production (Fenster 1995); the interactional and communicational dynamics of a bluegrass open jam session (Kisliuk 1988; Adler 1982); the life of semiprofessional bluegrass musicians (Tunnell and Groce, 1987); the interactonal dynamics between performer and audience during festival performances (Bealle 1983); ethos and stage persona of

\(^3\) Newgrass borrows heavily from traditional bluegrass form, content and themes but often offering a blending of both acoustic and electric instrumentation, traditional and modern vocal styles, and both formal and informal musical influences, including jazz, classical, rock and roll, folk, ragtime, and country.
professional musicians (Cantwell 1980); and the use of humor in bluegrass performance (Adler, 1982). Despite this comprehensive empirical literature of bluegrass music and culture, there are neither comprehensive studies of bluegrass festival life nor analyses of the festival as a site of performance for place and community. In the following chapter, I review the various and wide ranging literatures on place, community, and identity in postmodern society. After a discussion of the literature and theoretical perspectives that inform my work, in Chapter Four I discuss the methods that I used throughout my research and discuss the journeys that I traversed during this six-year project.
CHAPTER III:
THEORETICAL FRAMING AND LITERATURE

In this chapter, I review the major theoretical and empirical themes that organize the bulk of this study. I examine the existing literatures on the sociology of community, place, and mobility to contextualize the rise of what I call "portable communities." Mobile portions of the American population build and seek out these postmodern forms of community in response to increasing fragmentation, saturation, and loss of a meaningful attachment to place. First, however, I introduce the idea of the "New West," the New West bluegrass scene, and its surrounding social and cultural context.

The New West

A region infused with mythologies of renewal, rejuvenation, and romantic escape and adventure, the idea of a "new" American West has been in circulation for nearly two centuries. Characterized by enduring cycles of boom and bust, the American West has endured waves of constant change. With each period of bust, the emergent booms wrought changes that necessitated a reorientation of economic survival and a reinvention of regional identity. The notion of a New West, which signifies a rupture with the past and a reinvention of the present, emerges on the brink of these periods of change. Implied in its "newness," each reinvention of western identity calls upon notions of an "older" west that preceded it. Though these transitions imply a clean break from the ills and ill fortunes of
the past, these reinventions always incorporate symbolic and mythical elements of the past to better understand the present and future.

As the Western Frontier entered national consciousness as a site of vital economic and mineral resources, industry leaders along with the national government, military, and other seeking to stake their claim in the West’s vast riches ventured into this region under the banner of national interest and expansion. However, this seemingly endless frontier would soon become the fastest growing areas in the country. In the period from the 1890s to the 1940s, the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Rim regions became the most quickly urbanized of the United States. In fact, in the 1940s, nineteen of the twenty-five fastest growing metro areas in the country were situated in the American West, a growth trend that continues into the present day (Abbott 1993). Although this rapid and widespread urbanization continues to grow and flourish in the West, its mystique continues to retain elements of the endless and enduring frontier, especially for those living east of the Mississippi or further west along the sprawling coastlines of California.

As both a physical and mythical region, the American West carries significant weight in the political, cultural and geographical history of the United States. As a site of cultural memory, the American West continues to provide Americans with a nationalistic identity rooted in the values of economic progress and expansion, rugged individualism, and environmental conquest. Those settling in the West were initially driven by the promise of a new start, drawn by the possibility of tapping into the riches buried deep beneath the arid, rocky soil.
Even though Frederick Jackson Turner signaled the end of the frontier after the census of 1890, the Old Western frontier continues to live and circulate through the stories, songs, movies, and images of the contemporary West and provides a set of symbols for both personal and regional identity. Characterized by their strong mythical character, these images and symbols, especially as they are represented in the cowboy western (see Slotkin, 1992) and the tourist stops throughout the West, portray independence and individual achievement and "conjure dramatic vision of new beginnings and futures untold" (Rohrbough, 1994). As a set of mythologies, the cultural imagery and stories of the American West enshrine the hopes, dreams, aspirations and values that continue to influence the attitudes and model ideal behaviors for residents and tourists of the New West (Nash, 1999).

Tourist stops throughout the West advertise the "authentic" experience of Native American jewelry and artifacts, cowboy saloons, mining tours, Old West gambling depots, and ghost towns. Among these Old West relics co-mingle cappuccino and espresso cafés, sushi bars, Patagonia clothing shops, designer Orvis fly fishing outfitters, high end art galleries, and Land Rover SUV dealerships. Superimposed on a natural backdrop of vast panoramas, dramatic mountain vistas, strange and unfamiliar geologic landforms, and wide-open spaces, the West signifies a landscape and a region where individual is pitted against nature in a quest for self-discovery and independence. Among the small, relatively isolated farming, ranching, and mountain communities intermingle quite different residents and travelers to the New West. "The New West lifestyle has a
lot to do with the flood of well-off new-comers and their consumption patterns. Urban and suburban refugees come to the Interior West looking for salvation from the rat race; they appreciate the rugged landscape, the big sky, the mythical ‘Wild West,’ and opportunities to make money and spend it” (Riebsame 1997, p. 117).

A term coined to encapsulate the legacy of the Old West in the context of the present, “The New West” captures the experience of “a postmodern west in which old and new combine to create something different” (Riebsame 1997, p. 12). In a New West setting, the artifacts, narratives, and landscapes of the Western past collide with an often-contradictory present forcing contemporary spins on old stories and memories. As both Simon Schama (1995) and Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick (2000) point out, our memories of the West and Western places resemble the western soil in its often-visible sediments, layers, and strata. These visible and hidden layers interact as dialogical images in an often-contradictory New Western world. As new layers are built, remnants of the old seep through, remain at the sutures of sprawling developments and at the edges of new political and zoning boundaries, and ultimately overlap with the present uses and textures of the western landscape. Mining shafts, ramshackle cabins, ranches, mining machinery, farms, historical markers, prairie preserves, and open space coincide with a world inhabited by Wal-Mart Supercenters, strip malls, tract housing developments, upscale Ranchettes, and ski towns showcasing their absentee million dollar trophy homes.

The “Newest New West” (Limerick 1997) refers to the reinvention of cultural and regional identity that emerged after the bust of the mining and
mineral extraction industries in the late 1960s and 70s, which paved the way for a growing tourist and outdoor industry boom. Demographers and urban planners trace these transformations to migration patterns that began in the early 1970s. This “fifth migration,” represented a mass, voluntary migration of people and high-tech industry from the decaying and crime ridden cities of the East and South to the “wide-open” spaces of the West (Wolf, 1999). The fifth migration was into full swing by the 1990s, introducing massive residential growth and commercial development, national chain stores and mega-plex shopping centers, and voyeuristic tourism fueled by summer trips to national parks and winter sporting opportunities in the growing resort communities. Western geographer William Riebsame (1997) posits that the story of the New West is “about a region’s transformation into something resembling the rest of the country: a landscape of shopping malls, cookie-cutter subdivisions, and the same old social end economic problems” (p. 12). A region confronting the introduction of the homogeneous and “bland American culture that appears to make every place like every other place,” a ‘geography of nowhere’ (Kunstler 1993), the contemporary American West is a site of struggle over regional identity fueled by storied and mythical pasts and a quickly urbanizing and modernizing present. If the West is seen by its residents and tourist as a refuge from the rampant modernization and sprawling commercialization of urban landscapes “back east” and further west in California, as the last stronghold of authenticity and unspoiled natural splendor, how do they respond when they arrive to realize that it is the fastest growing and urbanizing regions in the country?
In the New West, urban growth and development have arrived unexpectedly on the doorsteps of metropolitan planning districts and rural, small town communities, leaving them ill prepared to manage “smartly” the droves of migrating settlers. Neat, tidy rows of tract housing, condominiums, and gated “community” apartment complexes sprouted up overnight, and line the once open and free roaming prairie countryside. Findlay (1992) argues that these transformations had two distinct consequences on the West. On the qualitative side, the shape of the Western city was being transformed in ways that seemingly ‘made it less legible as well as less conductive to the formation of community and the enrichment of culture. On the quantitative size, the growth of urban and suburban areas became so rapid and uncontrolled that it denied the inhabitants any stable sense of place, regional identity, or attachment. The new shape of suburban “communities” kept these regions from developing a shared identity and an enriched cultural life for its residents. The annexation of townships and open spaces “catered to westerners fondness for uninhibited growth,” but quickly “became injurious to resident’s sense of community,” because the sprouting up of suburb after suburb made people unsure where the city began and ended (p.32). Findlay states:

The conventional form and structure of urban areas, based upon nineteenth century American urban development, might be pictured as a magnetic pole that kept particles in a tight orbit around a distinct nucleus. In the newer portions of the western metropolis during the mid-twentieth
century, the particles increased in number too quickly to be held by the pull of the center (p.35).

The institutional public and private gathering spaces characteristic of small town, and early suburban America relied on an already existing town square, central business district, and community parks and gathering places. In the New West, rapid growth resulted in “automobile communities” sprouting up in traditionally rural areas where the local towns and townships could not build up the community infrastructure quickly enough to accommodate the burgeoning subdivisions, condominiums, tract housing, and apartment complexes. These housing structures arose with limited spaces and structures for community activity, and therefore make it difficult for groups of residents to form a public around which shared conceptions of place identification and community identity can emerge. For Findlay, the traditional town square, the community park, and the downtown historic district of many well established communities and towns becomes replaced with the apartment complex courtyard, the strip or indoor shopping mall, and the chain store coffee shop, leaving few local spaces for retreat, community gathering, or public discourse.

**The New West Bluegrass Scene**

In the contemporary period, the New West has drawn on its winter resort communities to provide year-round cultural entertainment through the establishment of annual music, art, and film festivals. Having established a prominent place within the rituals and traditions of New West culture (see Altherr
1996; Riebsame 1997), these festivals and celebrations provide a significant boost to the often-lagging summer tourist industry of many resort communities and provide residents and tourists a vital source of culture that is often sparse in rural, western areas (Riebesame, 1997). Though Colorado was only one of thirteen states to have never hosted a bluegrass festival, with four of the remaining twelve states located in the western region including Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, and Utah (Carney 1974), it is now host to the largest number of annual summer music festivals of any state in America (Wolf 1999, p.70), many of which are labeled and packaged as bluegrass festivals or feature bluegrass (or bluegrass influenced) acts as their primary draw. Places like Vail, Aspen, Telluride, Cuchara, Pagosa Springs, Keystone, Silverton, Pueblo, Lyons, Grand Junction and Durango in Colorado; Grand Targhee, Douglas, and Casper in Wyoming; Taos, Farmington, and Santa Fe in New Mexico; Hamilton, Montana; and Park City and Fountain Green, Utah, are among the sites in the New West where annual folk, old-time, and bluegrass music festivals have become a summer tradition. Despite the fact that the entire region was among the last to begin hosting bluegrass festivals (Carney 1974), over the last two decades, this region has experienced rapid growth of bluegrass music and culture, and has become an epicenter for bluegrass performance and production. In these settings the imagery and symbolism of the Old West mixes and mingles with those of Old Appalachia to create an altogether novel backdrop for community, place, and identity performances.
Bluegrass music in the New West constitutes a unique grouping of sites, participants, and lifestyles surrounding the enactment of a traditional form of American folk music. In the past twenty years, the intermountain West has emerged as a cultural epicenter for bluegrass musical production, instruction, and performance. It represents multiple levels of bluegrass musical performance, including weekend long summer festivals, formal and impromptu open jam sessions, radio broadcasts, and both street corner and concert hall performances. Within these spaces, various sub-genres of traditional bluegrass, old-time, folk, gospel, “newgrass,” alternative country, and “Dawg” or “New Acoustic” music coexist, with each style attracting a slightly different grouping of both performers and audience members. Bounded largely by the Front Range and foothills region of the Rocky Mountains, a number of its small and large towns and cities are home to a vibrant network of individuals who gather to play informally in local coffee shops, restaurants, and music shops, at community gatherings, public fairs and festivals, and in parking lots before, during and after professional concert

4 The bluegrass music and culture of this region are differentiated from other bluegrass communities by both the music and culture. Musically, this region is home to a number of bands and individuals who are re-defining or re-interpreting the bluegrass traditions. Culturally, this region engenders a specific type of festival and jam session atmosphere that is distinct from more conservative and traditional enactments in Appalachia and the Deep South. Thus, the overlapping styles of bluegrass music in this community constitute both an extension of and signify a rift with traditional bluegrass music. Because the contemporary consumption and production of bluegrass within the Rocky Mountain Region is characteristic of folk music revivals in general, the musical and cultural reconstruction in a new time, place, and setting alters the traditional musical and cultural forms (Rosenberg, 1996).

5 A fusion of jazz and classical influenced instrumental bluegrass associated with musicians like mandolin players David “Dawg” Grisman, guitarist Tony Rice, and banjo player Bela’ Fleck, among others.

6 The more progressive and modern forms of bluegrass tend to attract a more youthful, “party” crowd that is attracted to the festival primarily for the main stage performances while old time and traditional strains of bluegrass music attracts a slightly older, more conservative fan base that focuses more on informal amateur campground jamming. See Stikert’s distinction between four types of performance groups within urban folksong culture for a parallel to the diversity in tradition and style in contemporary bluegrass.
performances. It is in these spaces where both professional and amateur performers and audiences gather and co-mingle to observe main-stage performances by well-known bluegrass artists and to share in amateur musical performance through informal and spontaneous jam sessions. In fact, throughout the intermountain West and West Coast, open jam sessions or “picks”— sites where both recognizable and unfamiliar amateur bluegrass and old-time musicians join to make spontaneous music under a traditional repertoire and standardized jam structure— can be found every day of the week at local dining and socializing establishments. These sites constitute a set of ritualized gathering places for both musicians and audiences to perform bluegrass music and culture.

Suggestive of its growing appeal and influence in the region, individuals have assembled an impressive number of formal and informal networks that revolve around the culture of this distinctive brand of traditional American acoustic string band music. These networks and the resultant culture and lifestyle constitute what John Irwin (1973) refers to as a “scene.” As he explains, the scene is an explicitly recognized lifestyle and “configuration of behavior patterns which is well known to a group of actors.” It hinges upon a set of non-instrumental meanings, understandings, and interests adhered to by those participating in the larger collectivity (p. 131). Overlapping with the folk music and Grateful Dead scenes (Adams and Sardiello 2000; Pearson 1987), many participants found their way to the bluegrass and traveling festival scene through their experiences touring with the Dead or similar musical subcultures. Turning from the louder, electrified sounds of Rock N’ Roll they embraced in their youth (see Kotarba 2002), many
participants were attracted to the relaxed, acoustic character of bluegrass and the family friendly festival setting. Waves of newcomers were often exposed to the music through the multi-platinum soundtrack to the film *O' Brother Where Art Thou*, which featured an early folk and bluegrass sound. Still others found their path to bluegrass music through a yearning to reconnect with their family’s Appalachian cultural heritage, or through a relative or friend who introduced them to bluegrass music of Bill Monroe or the Stanley Brothers. The New West bluegrass scene, as such, is not easily defined or delimited by a distinct set of boundaries.\textsuperscript{7}

During the summer months, bluegrass fans from throughout the country (and world) converge on small, rural, Western mountain communities in outdoor music festival parks, amphitheaters, and county fairgrounds to perform and celebrate bluegrass music and culture. The region becomes home to tens of thousands of people visiting to participate in a growing summer festival movement in the West (Wolf, 1999). Festivalgoers in the American West include college students and post-graduates, manual laborers and technology specialists, small children and fans into their 70s and 80s. Many of the festival participants have entered careers or have made lifestyle choices to afford them weeks of free time during the summer months to travel from festival to festival across the summer outdoor concert tour circuit. The bulk of these participants have college or advanced degrees and find employment in the growing technology and financial sectors of the west. Drawn by the close proximity to camping, mountain

\textsuperscript{7} Although rooted in the rocky Mountain Region, many of its core participants and members live outside of the region. Every summer, a core group of participants travel (many over 2000 miles) to numerous festival sites peppered across the Rocky Mountain West.
biking, skiing and snowboarding, climbing, hiking, and the fact that many locations in the west offer abundant sunshine and relatively easy access to public land, mobile "seekers" (Adler and Adler 1999) have flocked to the region in search of adventure and recreation. As such, the growth of these festivals and the associated festival culture I introduce in this study are performances indicative of the mobility and economic freedom of these "New Westers." Starting with the post-WWII migration westward and accelerated by two consecutive waves of newcomers in the 1970s and 90s, this latest round of New Westerners embarked on a "national vision quest" to create a new American Region, one that fits their lifestyles and desires for a new sense of place (Riebesame 1997). Unencumbered by the crowded urban areas and the religiously and culturally conservative rural portions of the east, they have headed "out west" to start anew in a fresh and relatively new region of the country. Many non-Western natives make their pilgrimage "out west" for individual exploration, adventure, to be one with nature, and to enact or perhaps create a sense of independence. They experience these open, rural spaces of the New West as a land of escape and retreat, "a land not yet sliced into places" (Bauman 1997, p. 20). Though drawn to the West for its rugged, individualist symbolism and its wide-open spaces, participants long for a sense of community and kinship that eludes much of the Old West history and imagery.

While many participants travel to the region for one particular festival or to see a particular performer, dedicated fans spend their summer weekends traveling with tents or campers across the region or country on the bluegrass
festival circuit. Though fans are initially drawn to the festival for the main stage performances, the festival contains multiple nodes of activity all of which happen simultaneously. The main stage music performances customarily start in the late morning and go well into the evening hours. Several, smaller side stages are often assembled around the periphery of the festival grounds to showcase local and regional talent, workshops, or perhaps to feature impromptu duets or other unique configurations of well known professional performers that are scheduled throughout the weekend. After the main and side stage acts have finished for the evening, amateur musicians form spontaneous jamming circles throughout the campgrounds and parking areas circling the festival grounds, the most dedicated of which play until the wee hours of the morning. Occasionally, well known professional musicians will arrive to the campground, instrument in hand, to join in the picking and singing, much to the awe of the amateurs and onlookers.

During the daytime, festival promoters schedule a host of workshops that feature a variety of topics including instrument building, song writing, instrument and vocal instruction, traditional clogging and flatfooting dance classes, bluegrass history, and performance techniques. At the side or rear of the festival space, some festivals feature creatively themed kids day camps where festivalgoing parents can leave their children to be supervised by festival staff or share with them in leading the children through singing, painting, and arts projects. Adjoining these workshop areas are often extensive rows of booths and tents featuring local arts and crafts, handmade woodcarvings, jewelry, soap, clothing, musical instruments, trade publications, and camping or festival gear. A separate,
adjoining tent usually includes a festival sponsored mercantile featuring official festival paraphernalia, CD and tape recordings of the main stage acts, songbooks, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. In the front portion of the mercantile, or perhaps near one of the side stages, performers often meet with fans and sign CDs during officially scheduled band “meet and greets.” Also nearby is the food court. Whereas many of these food areas resemble standard county fair menus of turkey legs, bar-b-que sandwiches, elephant ears, foot-long hot dogs, polish sausages, and flank steak burgers, other more in tune with New West culture feature a quite different fare. In these settings, diners can find freshly brewed cappuccino and chai, Indian, Greek, Chinese, and Thai food, a selection of micro brewed beers, organic ice cream, gourmet Italian cuisine, and vegetarian burritos. These more progressive festivals also include a few informational tables about alternative fuels, composting, environmental preservation and conservation campaigns, and organic food and farming. When they need a break from the continuous music, festival participants seek shelter from the sun and heat on a nearby creek or river bank, venture along wilderness or national park hiking trails, or walk into the local town and peruse the specialty shops and eateries.

Though most festivals take place over a three or four-day weekend, participants will often arrive and leave several days before and after the actual main stage performances, staying on-site or in satellite campground facilities designed to accommodate the emergent tent communities that spring up around the festival site. Over the course of the week or two surrounding the festival, these primitive campsites evolve into elaborate villages that become a significant draw.
to festival participants in their own right. Though designed to provide temporary accommodations for those attending and spending the night at these festivals, these campsites often take on lives of their own. These camps are usually composed of a seemingly random assemblage of tents, pop up shelters, canopies, RVs, pull behind trailers, and passenger vans or busses connected with blue and green plastic tarps. These temporary structures are usually arranged in a circular pattern around a shared communal space, in which participants share cooking, food, music, and conversation. At these camping sites, participants carve a space within which they can gather intimately with other bluegrass fans and perform traditional bluegrass songs and fiddle tunes. Though many casual listeners attend these festivals, core participants are usually skilled amateur musicians who travel to multiple festivals throughout the summer months. In contrast to relative newcomers to the scene who often stay in single, standalone tents, core members camp with large groups of friends and their extended “festival families” in collectively joined tarps and pop-up shelters. Over the years, newer participants collect ideas from other veteran campers to make their temporary shelter or “camp” as comfortable and equipped as possible for the following year. Casual members are often residents of the local community who simply visit for the day and return home after the evening main stage performances have ended. After the festival ends, participants often create informal networks of communication via the Internet and continue face-to-face interaction at weekly jam sessions or

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8 There are a number of organized listserv discussion groups dedicated to bluegrass music, festivals, performance and instrumentation that help to maintain existing community ties among group members and aid in creating new bonds and networks among list subscribers.
concert performances. Through these interactional networks, groups of friends keep in contact and arrange for future festivals or jam sessions.

**The Quest for Community**

Though initially drawn to the festival for the opportunity to listen to and play bluegrass music, the impulse to return year after year, I argue, centers on a quest for intimate and inclusive community. Blending the romantic imagery and symbolism of communities of old with the realities, wants, and desires of new, the growth of bluegrass music and festival life illustrate what I consider to be a prototypical postmodern community. The notion of “postmodern community” describes an evolving definition of community that responds to changes occurring across the American landscape. Shifts in the national and global economy have lead to an exodus of manufacturing and the subsequent rise of service and high tech industries, growing geographical mobility and transience of the American workforce, increasing interconnectedness spurred by the rise of communication technologies, and the subsequent relocation of industries to reflect the concentration of workers in alternative lifestyle hotspots (Florida 2002; Kotkin 2000; Nevarez 2003). This increasing geographical mobility in the United States has made it difficult for individuals to sustain stable, rooted membership in local neighborhoods while the sprawling physical geography of new suburbs and towns has transformed the traditional village “main street,” making its characteristic intimacy difficult to replicate. (Kunstler 1993, 1996). Additionally, demographic changes such as the postponement of childbearing until later in life or the
increasing proportion of married couples without children has allowed a decoupling of individuals from a particular, stable geographic locale.

Traditionally, to be geographically rooted meant to be economically and socially stable. Being attached to a specific geographic location implied that individuals had the stability of close-knit family, friends, and regular employment to keep them firmly rooted. Without these roots, one was likely free to roam, ramble, or wander the countryside in search of work or shelter. To be mobile and transient was to be shiftless, untrustworthy, and unstable. Today, however, to be rooted geographically is to be “tied” economically to a place. Individuals who are geographically mobile are believed to be free from the fetters of family ties, oppressive social or economic institutions, the corporate world, and potentially stifling forms of small town social life. As transportation and communication technologies have liberated individuals from living their entire lives in a specific locale, the resultant mobility and transience of segments of the American population have not only altered the physical geography of American landscape, but have fundamentally altered our relationship to the local community (see Kotkin, 2000). Before I develop the idea of the mobile, postmodern community in greater depth, I provide a brief review of the scholarly literature on community and place.

The Sociology of Community and Place

Traditional conceptions of community presume a stable and enduring locality endowed with a strong and unified sense of history, tradition, and place
(Maclver and Page 1949, Schnore 1973, Selznick 1992). Often synonymous with the political jurisdiction of a particular city or town, modern notions of community assume an underlying institutionalized economic and political structure that helps support and organize the behavior of a particular group of geographically bounded individuals. Because of its numerous connotations and frequent use, misuse, and abuse, the concept of community is a slippery one. “Community” characterizes what Richard Weaver refers to as a “charismatic term,” (Weaver 1992) a word with a vast circulation but a wide and varying range of meanings (Cohen 1985, Gusfield 1975, Simonson 1996). As a result, community has become a word that, like art or pornography, becomes clearly recognizable yet variously defined by each individual. People know it when they see or experience it.

For conceptual clarity, Bellah et. al. (1985) defines “real” community in contrast to what he refers to as “lifestyle enclaves.” “A term used in contrast to community,” Bellah writes that a,

lifestyle enclave is formed by people who share some feature of private life. Members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities which often serve to differentiate themselves which often serve to differentiate them sharply from those with other lifestyles. They are not interdependent, do not act together politically, and do not share a history (335).

He holds that lifestyle enclaves such as fraternal organizations or social clubs are “fundamentally segmental” and thus celebrate the “narcissism of similarity” (72)
rather than real, inclusive community. Bellah defines the traditional, “real”
community as a community of memory: “a group of people who are socially
interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and
who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it”
(333). Such communities, according to Bellah, are composed of individuals who
self-consciously participate in its larger shared history and collective past. They
encompass relationships “which are characterized by a high degree of personal
intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion... a fusion of
feeling and thought, of tradition and commitment, of membership and volition”
(Nisbet (1966) 1996, p. 46). These communities of memory initially formed
around the public spaces of the central city or town hall and the seat of economic
commerce, which were usually situated in a central business district. Through a
shared set of productive activities, participation in the public sphere, and
involvement in voluntary associations, the traditional community was conceived
as a community of citizens.

An enduring theme in the scholarly literature, one mirrored in the
narratives of both the early bluegrass musicians and contemporary festival
participants is the tension between community and modernization. Early social
thorists explored the tension between community life and modernization during
industrialization and warned against the destabilization of social relationships that
they believed accompanied economic and social development (Durkheim 1933;
Tonnies 1957). For the past several decades, scholars have grappled with the
perceived decline of traditional community forms in the face of cultural and social
modernization (Putnam 2000, Wellman 1988). Defined in opposition to the forces of urbanization, both academics and laypersons continue to describe community as inherently incompatible with modernity (Cohen 1985). Although scholars lament the perceived decline in community, individuals seek novel ways to cultivate communal bonds and do so in ways that challenge traditional understandings of community.

From these early theoretical themes, a number of classic studies explored the dynamics of community life within large urban areas (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie [1925] 1967; Wirth 1938; Whyte 1943), suburbia (Gans 1967) and small town America (Dollard 1937; Vidich and Bensman 1958). Contemporary thinkers developed these themes and produced an extensive body of research that examined the evolving tensions and dynamics surrounding the individual and community which emerged as a result of late capitalist or postmodern societies (Anderson 1987; Etzioni 1993; Oldenburg 1999; Wuthnow 1998). Many scholars mapped the apparent decline of geographically rooted neighborhoods, the consequent decline in civic involvement or public sphere participation (Habermas 1962; Sennett 1977), and associated forms of social capital (Putnam 1995; 2000). Others, however, have argued that these declines corresponded to the simultaneous rise of other forms of non-traditional collectivities such as computer-mediated discussion groups and cyber-communities (Correll 1995, Jones 1995; Rheingold 1994), interpersonal networks (Wellman 1999), or anti-individualist “tribes” (Maffesoli 1996). These studies emphasized that membership in a community does not require that individuals share the same
street, neighborhood, or town. For example, in her ethnography of an electronic lesbian café, Correll (1995) challenges traditional place based understandings of community by demonstrating how members of a lesbian bulletin board created and sustained their virtual community through computer-mediated interaction alone. While some suggest that the decline in attachment to a particular locale corresponds to a decline in community (Bernard 1973), Correll argues that the notion of locale is being reformulated to account for virtual or experiential places that “need not be confined to a specific geographic location.” (Correll 1995) This insight has led others to shift their focus from neighborhood or place-based notions of community toward specific instances where individuals feel a sense of place, solidarity, or communion in the company of others. Despite mixed conclusions about the state of community life in postmodern America, individuals continue to seek out communal bonds in the wake of rapid social change as they have for centuries, but often do so in novel and creative ways. Whereas many individuals dissatisfied with their community-starved neighborhoods form voluntary associations to create or restore a sense of neighborly cohesion (Warren 2001), others flee to find it elsewhere.

Though we live in an increasingly mobile society, we maintain an especially strong attachment to home and home places (Feldman 1990). These bonds are especially important for immigrants to and migrants within the United States who often rely on network “chains” that link migrating individuals to family and friends in host communities (MacDonald and MacDonald 1974). These attachments to home aid to form the social networks that Massey (1994)
refers to as a “social infrastructure” of mass migration (Massey, et. al. 1994).
Though an extensive literature has documented the importance of place and
region for both personal and social identity (Cuba and Hummon 1993; Hummon
1990, 1992; Gerson, Stueve, and Fischer 1977; Lowe 2000; Sampson 1987), and
the role of employment in migration decisions (Mincer 1978; Kodrzycki 2001),
we often forego the comfort and rootedness of “home” to seek amenities and
experiences elsewhere (Florida 2002), a trend which is especially noticeable
among the retired (Hass and Serow 2001).

Adler and Adler (1999) support this notion in their study of transient
employee collectives at a Hawaiian resort. For the resort’s mobile and transient
“seekers,” the parameters of community life revolve increasingly around “shared
consumption, interests and lifestyle” (1999:52) rather than stable notions of
neighborhood, or place (Biggart 1994). Richard Florida (2002) develops this idea
by examining how the emergent and highly mobile “creative class” is shifting the
flow of work in the new economy toward certain locales. For these mobile
individuals the draw of “home” remains strong but is increasingly trumped by the
diversity of experience and lifestyle found elsewhere. While contemporary forms
and associations of neighborhood and community life stray from those
experienced in small towns and villages in late nineteenth and early twentieth
century America, people continue to long for the intimate social relations they
provided. Individuals pine for forms of community that mimic those of the past
but require certain levels of anonymity, openness, and variety that elude
neighborhoods of old (see Florida 2000). While some scholars who lament
community decline seek to restore social relations to a golden age of pre-modern or early twentieth century American society, the rise of geographical mobility and the sprawl of urban and suburban landscapes has fundamentally changed how and where individuals seek community. This study examines how an increasingly mobile subset of individuals drawn to the American West grapples with this longing for traditional forms and symbols of community in a region of people who frequently move, travel, relocate, or pursue leisure or lifestyle activities away from home.

Like the concept of community, traditional conceptions of place and place attachment have assumed a rooted relationship with a particular geographic locale. And like community, the concept of place has received considerable attention in recent scholarly literature. From fields as diverse as geography, architecture and planning, and environmental studies, scholars have argued for the centrality of place in understanding human attachments to and interactions with particular geographic areas. In sociology, however, there has been relatively scant and disparate focus on place as a central sociological concept (Gieryn 2000).

Though often conflated in the scholarly literature, the concepts of place and space have related but quite different meanings. Space refers to segments of the physical, natural, or built environment, whereas place refers to particular segments of physical space imbued with meaning and productive of human relationships. In the context of this study, I use the term space in two distinct ways. In contrast to place, I use space to refer to physical areas that are devoid of significant meaning or fail to evoke significant human attachment, what Marc
Auge (1995) refers to as “non-places.” Contrasted with historically significant and socially or politically active places, non-places are the spaces between places that are often passed over and largely ignored from day to day such as parking lots, strip malls, airports, bus terminals, and motorways. Second, I often use space as a shorthand term for “festival space”: a geographically bounded and distinct area in which festival participants perform and engage in other festival activities. Within this geographical space, I argue, participants actively create a meaningful sense of place.

The Oxford Dictionary of Geography defines 'place' as: “A particular point on the earth's surface; an identifiable location for a situation imbued with human values” (Mayhew 1997: 327). Though defined as a particular “point” in space, geographer Yi Fu Tuan argues that without human attachments and relationships, a place is stripped of its social and cultural significance. Tuan defines sense of place as "human being's affective ties with the material environment.” A particular point in space becomes place “when it is compelling we can be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol" (Tuan 1993). Highlighting its social and public dimensions, Lyn Lofland (1998) defines place as especially meaningful space, rich in associations, and steeped in sentiment. Additionally, Irwin Altman (1992) argues that place refers to space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes (p.5) and place attachment as “the bonding of people to places.” (p.2). All three of these definitions highlight the importance of socially ascribed values and group interactions, and demonstrate
the process through which undifferentiated space is transformed into a sense of place. However, an implicit assumption in the place literature is that places are enduring, rooted, and tied to a specific geographic locale. Place is often conceived as “a space with a sense of locality and identity... a recognized territory of symbols” (Klapp, 1975, p. 48) or as Michael de Certeau (1984) conceives it, a location, “an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (p. 117). In the sociological literature, place attachment is often defined in terms of commitment of individuals to their place of residence or enduring places in which they inhabit frequently like coffee shops (Milligan 1998) or bars, restaurants, salons, or bookstores (Oldenberg 1997). In this study, I challenge notions of place that assume geographic stability by offering an understanding of place and place attachment that is mobile, transient, and often short lived yet enduring and permanent in the minds of its participants.

The concept of place, I argue, unites the physical and geographical with the emotional and deeply personal (Buell 2001) and is constituted and reinforced in and through the narratives and stories that individuals share. In his book Spaces for the Sacred, Philip Sheldrake states that place “…refers not simply to a geographical location but to a dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. Place is space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious” (Sheldrake 2001:1). Place, therefore, unites the physical and geographical with the emotional and deeply personal in ways that evoke a meaningful sense of who we are where we feel at home. Attachments to place often have little to do with the actual physical geography or location of a
particular place, but have more to do with our memories and narratives about those places. Especially in mobile or portable communities such as the bluegrass festival (Gardner 2004), the notion of place is one that is a short lived experience, but is carried on in and through memories and stories enacted in participants’ narratives during the festival off-season. A mobile and transient understanding of place is particularly evident in transient refugee communities or immigrant settlements that recreate connections with and attachments to home communities in transportable settings. One’s sense of place describes a complex and multi-layered interactional network of sensations, feelings, and sentiments that unite our experiences with the physical, sensual environment to create a meaningful sense of being or feeling “at home.” A definition of place therefore is inextricably tied to individuals’ narratives and memories of that place, whatever forms these relationships take. With the rise of geographical and spatial mobility, and the spread and diffusion of communication and transportation technologies, place is no longer local (Sheldrake 2001).

Scholars of community have found that attachment to place declines as communities become larger and more densely populated (Hauser 1965). It is believed that small communities lend themselves to close, interdependent networks of friends and family that strengthen community ties, while larger, geographically dispersed communities “serve to broaden and weaken these networks and decrease attachment” (Goudy 1990; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974; Rice and Steele, 2001, p. 398). Putnam (2000) argues that sprawling physical geography of many cities is “especially toxic” for the decline in community and
civic engagement. Because of the poor layout of many American cities and transportation systems, Americans spend increasing amounts of time in vehicles traveling from place to place and less time engaging local communities. We spend more time "moving around" from day to day, from weekend to weekend, much of which is spent in non-places: our vehicles, in front of computer screens, in airport terminals, in shopping mall parking lots, and placeless suburban "big box" chain store outlets. Familiar to each of us and temporarily "home" for the transient or the tourist, these non-places offer a stopping over place for many, but a "real place to nobody" (Oldenburg 1997, p. 215). The displacement of "real" places, the "great good places" that offered individuals a sense of belonging, a node for identity, and expression of individuality are becoming relics of the past, argues Ray Oldenburg (1997). He writes,

Where once there were places, we now find non-places. In real places the human being is a person. He or she is an individual, unique and possessing a character. In non-places, individuality disappears. In non-places, character is irrelevant and one is only the customer or shopper, client or patient, a body to be seated, an address to be billed, a car to be parked (p. 205).

For Oldenburg, places hinge on memory, tradition, and direct personal experience. There are places where individuals can express their individuality and solidify their identity as being a part of something unique. Over time and with growth, development, and gentrification, places are often transformed into indistinctive or undifferentiated space as they are modernized, homogenized,
routinized, and rendered indistinct from surrounding areas. As bulldozers clear existing places for “tract housing, high-rise apartments, and parking lots for hordes of strangers moving in,” Klapp (1975) writes that they are disruptive of the symbols of a place and one’s sense of familiarity with the territory. He warns that “as America becomes one vast suburbia, high-rise center, and parking lot, it will cease to be a place and become a modernized space” (p. 48) and will essentially rob individuals of regional and geographical identity (Klapp, 1975). Articulating this transition from place to space, Thomas Gieryn argues that “space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out.” (Gieryn 2000)

**Place and Community in Postmodern Society**

The advent of cultural postmodernity and late capitalist or post-industrial societies signifies this movement from place to space. In this new postmodern framework, individuals face a world in which transnational capitalism, labor and the global circulation of commodities have “made the negotiations of identity more visible challenging the modernist longing for a whole and ‘real’ identity anchored in a clearly defined space” (Drzewiecka and Nakayama 1998, p. 21). The abandonment or decline of meaningful place and the celebration of a freer sense of space has led to a crisis of identity, a “crisis of place” (Sheldrake 2001). Because Individuals “know and value all things through contrast” (Neumann 1993, p. 225), our understanding of place emerges through a “perspective by incongruity” (Burke 1935) fuels the distinction between increasing “space” of
postmodern society and the sense of "place" that it has supplanted. As such, individuals continue to long for and seek out the qualities of experience that meaningful places provided in the past.

A place, as a marker of personal identity (Klapp 1975), gathers its meaning and significance in relation to other places, especially these non-places. Places also have an ability to evoke a strong sense of community, which arises from people's convictions about what the place is not and where it is not, as well as what it is (Allen et. al. 1998, p. 82). As such, place acquires its meaning as it is compared and contrasted with other places to which an individual has stronger or weaker connections. Places evolve, change, grow, and recede. Places can be torn down or built up, preserved or developed. Individuals move into and out of places. People can also fall in love with or come to despise particular places. Places can also be held closely in one's memory or perhaps forgotten altogether. Over time, these changes alter the relationships that individuals have with particular places, and thus change the places themselves. A definition of "sense of place" must therefore necessarily encapsulate the experience of placelessness (Relph 1977). Individuals tend to be attracted to and identify with places to which they have intimate ties and tend to avoid those with which they have minimal ties or perhaps negative relationships. The attraction of one particular place may have much to do with one's distaste or negative experience with other places. In other words, the concept of place necessarily calls into being those spaces and spheres of life to which individuals feel disconnected or otherwise banished. As such, understandings of place must capture narratives of attachment and displacement.
and incorporate the conflict between places that individuals are seeking and those they are fleeing, especially for mobile or transient populations.

In the academic world, place and mobility are frequently viewed as competing and mutually exclusive social forces. Different literatures fluctuate between viewing mobility as a threat to place attachment and celebrating mobility as an escape from stifling and limiting attachments to place (Gustafson 2001). Social theorists have voiced their skepticism of place and place attachment as the rise of information technologies have transformed social and economic relationships by decoupling individuals from stable physical locations (Calhoun 1991; Giddens 1991, Gustafson 2001). In other social science literature, mobility has been regarded as a deviation, associated with uprooted individuals lacking social integration (Gustafson 2001) or alternatively contrasted with the poor and marginalized who are subjected to increasing social control and restrictions on mobility due to economic and labor force circumstances (p. 669). Many see mobility as a detriment to the creation and accumulation of social capital and a vibrant public sphere and have linked it to the decline of local community. Additionally, scholars have found that low mobility rates tend to promote the types of interpersonal bonds characteristic of participation in formal and informal groups and voluntary associations (Putnam 2000). As Rice and Steele point out, “residential stability gives people the time to get to know each other and increases the likelihood that they will form the associations that foster attachment” (Rice and Steele 2001, p. 398). Drawing out the social costs of mobility, Robert Putnam (2000) argues that “frequent repotting disrupts root systems” (p. 204), and as
Klapp argues, mobility “pulls roots and makes particular persons less important in their relationships to one another.” (Klapp 1975, p. 49). Though accurate in depicting mobility’s role in weakening stable, residentially rooted notions of community and place, mobility also lends itself to the formation of altogether new forms of community and renewed constructions of and attachments to place.

Clifford (1997) has demonstrated that “roots” has been an important metaphor organizing academic and lay understandings of place attachment. Such an emphasis on roots links people to a place and identity to territory through the imagery of being physically linked to earth, soil, and land. However, scholars have recently reconceptualized this relationship to land and territory in terms of routes (Clifford, 1997; Gilroy 1993, Hall 1995). Calling for a reexamination of the metaphor, Gustofson argues, “rather than focusing on the local anchorage of peoples and cultures, (routes) points toward their mobility, their movements, encounters, exchanges, and mixtures” which may be permanent or temporary (p. 671). A growing body of literature investigates transient and mobile collectives of migrants, travelers, workers, and tourists who do not necessarily “belong” to the places, for the moment, they are staying (Adler and Adler, 1999; Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996; Hetherington, 2001; Pries, 1999; Rojek and Urry, 1997). Though a growing number of studies have examined the rise of global mobility and transience, few studies have examined spaces where mobility and place coexist (see Duffy, 2001 for a notable exception).

The portable, mobile, and transient forms of communal living cultivated in New West bluegrass festival settings represent the prototypical postmodern
community by fusing mobility with place. These communities confront the
demographic and political realities of sprawling postmodern landscapes and
reconfigure festival spaces to bring people together in ways that cultivate
perceivably intimate, authentic, and inclusive forms of interaction. Though many
argue that the emergence of postmodern lifestyles, landscapes, and identities are
necessarily fractured and fragmented, saturated and self-indulgent (Gergen 1991),
they have also spawned novel forms of community life that attempt to defy these
impulses. These postmodern forms emerge out of the tension between
modernization and community and incorporate elements and symbols of
Communities past in a convenient fusion with amenities and comforts of the
present. Distinct from mere lifestyle enclaves, participants cultivate these
communities in response to the decline of communities of memory. Whereas
these real communities of memory relied on a stable population of geographically
rooted individuals and families, these postmodern communities emerge from the
mobility and transience of their participants and thus tend to be portable or easily
transferred from place to place.

Gergen (1991) asks “Is it not possible that communities of the like-minded
could develop from the resistance of postmodern life?” (p. 211). Though holding
out hope, he answers in the negative because “the technology of social saturation
works toward the dissolution of homogeneous, face-to-face communities, and
toward the creation of a polymorphous perversity in social pattern” (p. 212).
Arising from this perversity, Gergen argues, emerges three distinct types of
postmodern forms of community: collage, cardboard, and symbolic. A collage
community is one in which the “homogeneity in life patterns gives way to a multiplicity of disjunctive modes of living... a mélange of disparate and often contradictory ways of life.” Stemming from the increasing mobility and transience of a diverse selection of individuals, their relocations create collages of distinct and separate yet co-existing modes of living, belief, systems, values, and codes of conduct. Cardboard communities are those that are largely emptied out and virtually vacant due to frequent vacations, work related travel, and weekend escape. They are communities “in which all the trappings of face-to-face communities are maintained, but the participating bodies are absent.” (p. 212)

Finally, Gergen describes symbolic communities: virtual communities primarily of the electronic kind whose members are linked “primarily by the capacity of their members for symbolic exchange—of words, images, information... (in which) physical immediacy and geographic closeness disappear for a criteria of community.” (p. 212)

Though descriptively accurate and reflective of the changes taking place within our urbanizing and suburbanizing spaces, these choices leave little for the individual who seeks inclusive, face-to-face communal interaction with others. Where do these people go to seek out the forms of face-to-face community for which they long? Do they have no choice but to court community among a series of disjunctive and separate social groups, in emptied out cardboard communities, or physically alone in front of a computer screen? Is it safe to assume that those leaving their residential “cardboard” communities are doing so in isolation? Is there little agency for the individual to resist these limiting choices for
community? "What is to be said of the traditional community as a means of solidifying resistance against postmodern intrusions" (214)? Gergen answers, "communities are becoming increasingly less able to serve such a function. To do so, they would require the homogeneity of beliefs and the repetitive, face-to-face reinforcement that all the major technologies of the century are in the process of undermining" (214). Though Gergen argues that these technologies are undermining traditional forms of community, they are also producing an alternative community form that he overlooks.

As mentioned above, "real" communities of the past rely on key elements of tradition, ritual, a strong sense of regional identity or place, heterogeneity and inclusivity, an active public sphere, and a collective memory of its residents' shared pasts. Moving beyond the duality of communities of memory and lifestyle communities (Bellah, et. al. 1985), portable communities reside between these two poles. Though often detached from the economic, political, and cultural realities of real communities of memory, these portable communities often take on their customary characteristics: they are rooted in tradition, ritual, and collective memory, the constitute a reliable and meaningful sense of place, and they provide a node for regional and personal identity formation.

The enduring tensions between mobility and community, modernization and tradition lead to the formation of what I refer to as "portable communities" (Gardner, 2004). Formed as purposeful, motivated responses to their perceived alienating and isolating conditions of modern sittlichkeit,9 participants in portable

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9 Because of its multiple meanings and threads, Peter Simonson (1996) provides a useful distinction between two poles of contemporary community talk. On one hand, gemeinschaft
communities create spaces for intimate and inclusive *gemeinschaft* social interaction they find lacking in their daily lives. Participants create these communities as an alternative to geographically rooted neighborhoods and participate with varying levels commitment. By addressing these tensions in this study, I provide an alternative to scholars’ bifurcation of residential and experiential forms of community. I explore how individuals create portable communities as a cultural response to their geographical mobility, and their feelings of social isolation and community decline at home. I do not claim here that portable communities are substitutes for traditional community forms, but I examine the various ways in which individuals construct the bluegrass festival experience as a form of community *sui generis*, which supplements rather than entirely replaces their attachments to home and place. Found in multiple settings and locales, portable communities are loosely organized yet intimately tied groups of similarly minded individuals that participants seek out on the road when traveling or moving frequently from one place to another. One characteristic of their portability is that these communities can be “picked up” and moved from site to site. They surface in multiple locales, but take on a strikingly similar form and logic that is instantly familiar to members. With relative ease, festivalgoers can connect and bond with other individuals without first knowing them or having formal contacts, friends, or institutional relationships to establish initial entrée

relations refer to a communal grouping of individuals defined in opposition to self-serving individualism and on the other hand, *sittlichkeit* relations which describe places to live and work and where social problems may be addressed. Whereas the former may mirror placeless lifestyle enclaves, the latter represent communities of memory that are rooted in a specific geographic locale. Though described in binary terms by scholars of community, these two elements of community *gemeinschaft* and *sittlichkeit* are neither distinct nor mutually exclusive. Forms of *gemeinschaft* certainly exist within the context of peoples’ homes, workplaces, and sites of public discourse and in many cases form in response or as an alternative to *sittlichkeit*. 

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into the setting. Participants in these communities take advantage of the
technological amenities and conveniences of modern life to build temporary
forms of portable shelter and to reconfigure spaces within which they stage
nostalgic forms of communal interaction. As such, they reconfigure previously
uninhabited spaces for days and weeks at a time to cultivate a memorable and
meaningful sense of place.

In portable, postmodern communities, participants identify with the
festival site as a distinct, memorable place yet it is mobile, transient, and
continually changing and evolving from one year to the next. In fact, the
memories and meanings of these special places that bluegrass festival participants
carry with them when not at the festival are in fact “non-places” for nearly fifty
weeks of the year. Many return to vacant fields, open spaces, public
campgrounds, and national forest land when not in use for the festival.
Additionally, as Rebecca Adams (1999) has shown, Grateful Dead fans have
identified with and have in fact “mapped” particular places in concert venues
across the country where particular individuals tend to congregate in the mobile
concert tour settings.

When examining the motives behind individuals’ participation in these
portable, postmodern communities, it is important to examine not only why they
participate in these communities, but also why they are turning away from other,
competing forms of social life. My goal here is not to argue whether bluegrass
represents a “real” or “authentic” or “superior” form of community or to glorify
or celebrate the communal forms of interaction that participants craft in festival
settings. Rather my goal is to examine how a groups of residents in the New American West describe their participation in and attachment to mobile and portable forms of communal living that have sprouted up around bluegrass festival culture. Participants in these communities indicate that in these settings, members cultivate spaces for open and inclusive participation among its diverse members and provide accessible channels of transparent, democratic decision-making about the governance and long-term maintenance of these communities. Though their members do not form these communities around their work or political life, they create nodes for communal interaction and participation within existing neighborhoods, cities, and towns. Participants create these communal spaces outside of local institutions and formal political parties, but form the kinds of enduring networks and relationships in these settings that foster building social capital and an active and inclusive public sphere (see Putnam 2000). Though many festival settings have a centralized and often private organizational structure of festival promoters, land owners, and administrative staff, the shape, contour, and emplacement of the campground setting often emerges from the direct input of active festival community members through participation on festival sponsored e-mail discussion lists and Internet bulletin boards.

In this chapter, I laid out the major theoretical themes that drive the following analysis of bluegrass festival communities in the New American West. Through a close examination of the historic and symbolic underpinnings of this particular community, and a thick description (Geertz 1973) of bluegrass festival
campsite settings, I aim to challenge conventional modes of thinking about community, place, regional and personal identity, especially in light of geographical mobility. I examine how a particular subset of New Westers, upwardly and geographically mobile residents of and tourists to the American West, respond to the crisis of place in contemporary society by creating a mobile and transient sense of place in the bluegrass festival camp. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods that I employed throughout my research. I also address my theoretical and epistemological framework and discuss some challenges that I faced in the research site.
CHAPTER IV:
DATA AND METHODS

As a child of no more than six years old, I recall a vivid moment at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio that marks my first exposure to bluegrass music. My family and I had just exited the gates of the Blue Streak, the rickety wooden roller coaster that gave my stomach quite a whirl. The ride likely had the same effect on my father who, passing by the stage at the edge of the Frontier Village— a portion of the park designed to recreate the life and culture of the “Old West”— heard the sounds of a live bluegrass band and decided it was a good place for our family to rest and settle our agitated bellies. I remember distinctly laying in the grass on my back in the shade of an oak tree, quite perplexed at the notion that there could be such a thing as blue colored grass. My father explained to me that “bluegrass” was a style of Appalachian folk music and that referenced its origin in the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky. Though I recall little of musical performance but the scratchy, rusty sound of the fiddle, the festive plunk of the five-string banjo, and the rustic frontier themed stage as a backdrop, I do remember how it made me tap my feet. Unlike most of my fathers’ music collection, bluegrass grabbed my attention.

Throughout my childhood, my mother and father would play bluegrass music on their eight-track cassette player during road trips and vacations in our family’s silver Ford Econoline passenger van. Several years later, after several heavy metal and “Rock ‘n Roll” album purchases later, I re-discovered these distant yet familiar sounds through my participation in the folk rock music scene.
in my college town of Bowling Green, Ohio. My favorite local band at the time, Ekoostik Hookah, would often reserve a few songs at the end of each performance to strap on their acoustic guitars and banjos to play a few of their favorite bluegrass numbers. Though I could barely recall the actual songs and melodies of my youth, the familiar sounds of the music brought back vague memories of miles spent in the back of the passenger van traveling across the Midwest countryside.

In the fall of 1997, I entered graduate school at the University of Colorado at Boulder to embark on my doctorate degree in sociology. As a budding bluegrass fan, I was amazed at the expansive selection of bluegrass musical events that the region had to offer. Hosted at local cafes, restaurants, and bars, any day of the week I could seek out informal amateur bluegrass jams or attend professional bluegrass performances at the various music venues across Boulder County. I spent many a winter afternoon and evening at local dining establishments like Foolish Craigs, the Pioneer Inn, the Millsite, and the Kaddy Shack listening to their impressive amateur jam circles. Because the festival and jam circuit moves inside or further south for the winter, at the time I was not immediately aware of the extensive array of summer events that peppered the New West countryside.

I attended my first bluegrass festival, the Rockygrass Festival in Lyons, Colorado, in the summer of 1998, where my father and I sat through three days of steady rain. I was immediately struck by the large number of fans who, having sought shelter under their blue tarps, rain parkas, or makeshift jackets of black plastic trash bags braved the unseasonably wet and cold weather to camp, dance,
and jam in the campgrounds. Initially puzzled by their willingness to endure the sour weather to keep the festival alive, I concluded that the bluegrass festival was an important and meaningful event in their lives, and wanted to understand how and why it could generate such a commitment. Inspired by the amateur bluegrass jams and performances in the festival campsite, later that year, I purchased an old Fender Jumbo acoustic guitar and began playing the few folk and bluegrass tunes I could muster. I soon met up with Caleb Olin, a Masters student in the Religious Studies department at CU Boulder who was an avid banjo player and bluegrass fan. Over time we honed our skills, took lessons, enrolled in several bluegrass-jamming classes at Woodsongs Music, and slowly progressed to the point where we were not embarrassed to play in front of others in a public setting. We started attending a weekly, local jam at the Acoustic Café in the quirky mountain town of Nederland just to the west of Boulder and were introduced to a vibrant network of amateur and professional musicians who were dedicated performers of bluegrass music. Over time, bluegrass music consumed me as I found myself spending the majority of my time away from my graduate studies practicing new fiddle tunes, jamming at local cafes, and preparing for the bluegrass festival season.

Though at first a diversion from the demands and rigors of my graduate work, I slowly began to see the bluegrass scene as thoroughly rich with sociological and ethnographic potential. This historical and cultural depth led me to take advantage of my participation in the scene as an opportunistic research situation (Riemer 1977). I initially began this project through a set of course papers in professor Bryan Taylor’s graduate seminar in Cultural Studies. My initial
goal was to explore through textual analysis the mythic and symbolic underpinnings of the New West bluegrass music revival in an attempt to explain the genre’s growing appeal in the Front Range region. I developed these initial ideas further in Patti Adler’s two semester seminar series in Ethnographic Methods by interviewing a sample of participants in the local bluegrass music scene. From my initial observations and conversations with fellow bluegrass fans and musicians, I sensed an underlying set of themes that organized participants’ involvement in bluegrass music and culture.

I initially entered the bluegrass scene as strictly an audience member of bluegrass concerts, festivals, and jam sessions and slowly moved to casual observer and gradually assumed a research role of complete member\(^\text{10}\) (Adler and Adler 1987). On a local level, I attended roughly one hundred public open jam sessions, a dozen instructional courses and instrument camps, and close to a hundred professional performances. Through this participation, I came into contact with a familiar group of faces and personalities, many of whom were either “pickers”\(^\text{11}\) or loyally supported the large cast of both professional and amateur bluegrass performers. As my interest in bluegrass music and culture grew, I began to think about and document my experiences and observations more systematically. I employed observational field research and engaged in both

\(^\text{10}\) Throughout this study, I fluctuated between complete member and active member (Adler & Adler 1987) as my participation waxed and waned with the demands of my graduate work and other life events that reduce my participation as a core member of the bluegrass scene. Though taking time away from jams and some festivals, I retained enough contact with members of the scene and my skills as a bluegrass picker to enter back after some absence with few problems. However, I often found that when I did return, there were a continually a host of new faces and players with whom I needed to acquaint myself.

\(^\text{11}\) Picker is a generic term for bluegrass musician as with most instruments the strings are picked or plucked.
formal and casual conversations about bluegrass music with fans and musicians for six years (1998-2004).

Gathering data through longitudinal participant observation (Agar 1996), I collected and assembled my field notes over this six-year span. I attended over twenty regional bluegrass festivals representing both national and regional circuits. Accordingly, I shared my research interests and intentions with those in the setting I interviewed or with whom I interacted frequently. However, it wasn’t until I established myself as a bluegrass guitar player or “flatpicker” that I was able to participate in impromptu jam sessions and become a part of the bluegrass musician networks first-hand. As I sharpened my skills as a guitar player, I was able to gain the respect and camaraderie of the more advanced players as well as local professionals who frequented the local scene. Membership in these networks allowed me, at times, to see and experience sides of the setting that a new or non-musician participant would not, including backstage areas of the formal performances and interactions with musicians in higher ability level jam sessions.

While studying the interactional dynamics of individuals in the bluegrass scene, I collected and recorded field observations of festival settings, jam sessions, and campgrounds on a small notepad. I often wandered into festival camps and began to engage in casual conversations with festivalgoers about their place of origin, their experience in the festival site, and some of the reasons underlying their participation. Though never really entering these conversations with an agenda for gathering data, individuals would often provide me with tremendous insight into the special elements of bluegrass music culture that kept
them coming back. I would frequently return to my tent, or a nearby porta potty, my ethnographic “backstage,” to jot down these insights or perhaps document particularly interesting observations or comments that I heard throughout my journeys throughout the festival site. I also carried a 35mm camera with me nearly everywhere I went to capture some of the physical and more visual elements of the setting that could not be captured fully in words. I often returned to these photographs to “take me back” to the setting as I was logging my fieldnotes into my computer to better capture the scene and setting as I wrote. I also analyzed these photographic images of the festival, particularly the festival site, to better understand participant’s use and configuration of physical space. I include a selection of these photographs throughout this study.

After spending several years in the bluegrass scene, I had accumulated a quite impressive network of friends, pickin’ buddies, both amateur and professional musicians, and festival promoters. As such, I had a large group of individuals who were eager to talk to me about my research and sit down with me for a taped conversational interview. I first sampled respondents by relying on convenience sampling methods (Cochran 1977) from my initial group of friends and acquaintances I met informally at festivals or at open jam sessions. Through chain referrals and snowball sampling methods (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), I then established contacts with individuals located in the multiple layers and status groups of the bluegrass scene, ranging from casual listener to well-renowned professional musician. The bulk of my responses were collected through twenty-five, one to two-hour, face-to-face, in-depth interviews which I customarily
recorded at a local coffee shop, restaurant, or at the interviewee’s home. I recorded each of these formal, conversational interviews with a tape recorder or digital recording device and transcribed them shortly thereafter. I began each interview by asking participants to describe when and where they had first encountered bluegrass music, and then asked them explain their level of interest and participation in festival life. From these initial questions, I launched into a series of questions that probed their experiences and participation in the scene and setting. Because of their conversational nature, and the diverse selection of participants I interviewed, the list of questions I asked during each interview was unique. Though I often had an interview schedule beside me to aid me in asking my most important questions, I found myself completely abandoning it during each interview as the conversations took on lives of their own and took us places, that at times, I was not expecting to go. Before each interview, I secured consent from my respondents, which permitted me to use and publish their narratives for my research purposes while granting the anonymity of their responses if they so desired (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

I systematically coded data from my field notes and organized them using the key terms and vocabularies participants used to describe their attraction to and participation in this scene. Drawing insights from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I later organized these into thematic categories. I used theoretical sampling methods (Charmaz 2000) to broaden my sample and further develop my analysis by selecting and interviewing additional respondents that expanded and challenged my emergent analytical framework. I read through my
fieldnotes and transcribed my interviews, I sought patterns and emerging typologies of data (Lofland and Lofland 1995). I organized my data according by grouping like quotes and observations together and began the process of organizing data into useful and interesting categories (Charmaz 2000). From these categories emerged many of the key themes of my research, including place, community, simplicity, and identity. Interpreting this data through emergent, inductive inquiry (Becker and Geer 1960), I further refined the key terms and vocabularies that participants used to describe their participation in the scene to reflect competing and at times, contradictory perspectives and accounts.

Though I had a large selection of potential interviewees based on my well-connected network of friends and musicians, I drew many of my interview subjects from the festival site itself. However, as a site of vacation and relaxation for many, the setting provided some interesting challenges. Often, as I approached relative strangers in the festival site, I could sense that my conversations with them were starting to interrupt their enjoyment of the music or their leisure time. I learned quickly that it was next to impossible, and often quite rude to interrupt their enjoyment of the festival with my analytical probing. Realizing this, I resorted to seeking out people who were back at the festival camp tidying up or otherwise engaging in activities that would be worthy of a conversational distraction. Often I would pass through campsites with a gentle “howdy,” and would find myself in the thick of it with a random festivalgoer. Through this use of this on-the-spot, impromptu interview method, I broadened my sample to include over one hundred additional respondents.
Though overcoming these small obstacles, I encountered other a few other problems. Because of its mobile and transient nature, I often found it difficult to track down certain members of the community that I had met at a particular festival or jam session. Often I found it challenging to take one or two hours out of a person’s festival to conduct an interview. To get around interviewing these people at the festival site, I often collected their business card or wrote down their e-mail so I could contact them electronically. I supplemented my tape-recorded face-to-face interviews with a roughly seventy-five open-ended, interview survey questionnaires that I mailed electronically to subjects living outside of the local area. I usually began with a stock of questions that I would ask most interview subjects. As we e-mailed back and forth, I tried to emulate a “real time” conversation by asking them to clarify or expand on particular ideas or responses that they provided. Though some dropped out of the communication after a few exchanges, there are others I continue to write to this day.

Through the use of an additional “phenomenological” interview approach through which I would faithfully reconstruct accounts of naturally occurring conversations (Pearson, 1987), I captured the anecdotes and insights from a cast of individuals who either left the local area after a festival or whose participation in the scene was sporadic or intermittent. Through this method, I was able to gather responses from participants who I may not have seen again for several years. This approach also allowed me to converse with participants without impinging on their enjoyment of the music as the festival was taking place. From these spontaneous and informal conversations, I gathered insightful information
about their city of origin, the reasons why they would travel often-long distances to participate in the scene, and what kept them returning to the festival.

Regardless of their particular geographic location, age, class, political affiliation, or level of involvement in the festival life, individuals provided a consistent set of motivations to explain their participation. Organized through the dominant vocabularies participants used to explain the community’s appeal, I describe the formation of this community through a set of “vocabularies of motive” (Mills 1940). Mills argues that motive vocabularies emerge from intersubjective interpretations of purpose that underlie individual behavior. Described by Mills as “the terms with which interpretation of conduct by social actors proceeds” (1940:904), these vocabularies provide a common language through which people come to understand and perhaps justify their participation in the setting (or anything else for that matter). Situated in a larger social context, I read these vocabularies as “rhetorics of motive” (Burke 1950) that participants use to address and respond to social concerns they confront outside of the festival setting.

At the same time as this project was progressing, I was working on a project that examined public perceptions of growth and development along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains (Gardner and Burgess 2003, Gardner, et. al. 2003; Burgess, Kaufman, and Gardner, 2003, Elliott, Kaufman, Gardner, and Burgess 2003). After my initial interviews for the bluegrass project, I began smuggling into each bluegrass interview a question or two to help inform my other project by asking respondents what they felt was the most pressing social
issue confronting the Front Range region. Unanimously, respondents identified that urban and suburban sprawl, loss of community and community character, and environmental decay spawned by rampant and uncontrolled growth and development were the most serious problems facing the Rocky Mountain West. In a curious turn, participants would then consistently couch their participation in bluegrass music and festival life as an escape from this increasing modernization of their hometowns and communities in the West.

Though participants denied that politics was important in organizing their festival experience, they consistently couched their participation in political terms. When I began to ask participants more explicitly about the festival itself, they stated that they attended because it was fun and provided them with a relaxing setting to listen to and play music. However, when I probed deeper and asked them why it was “fun” and “relaxing,” they responded that it gave them a space to escape the “real world” or politics, work, and responsibility. They stated that the festival provided them with a space where they could create novel forms of community, engage in intimate and inclusive social interaction, and return to a place that was considered simpler and more authentic than their increasingly complex and technologically driven modern environments. The festival also provided an alternative to “home” since they felt better integrated into the rituals and traditions of the festival camp than their home communities. Though my discovery of potential links between cultural modernization and urban growth and development in the New West and participation in bluegrass music and festival life were quite accidental, it is this link I seek to explore in this study. I first
introduce a few key theoretical, methodological, and epistemological insights that drive my analysis.

**Ethnography, Performance, and the Drama of Social Action**

Ethnography as a method and an epistemology is rooted in the idea that social and cultural interpretation is a search for understanding that begins with cultural performances (Conquergood 1992, p. 86). A recent trend in the communication and sociological literature, scholars are beginning to integrate this fruitful combination to highlight how both ethnographic research (Denzin 2001) and ethnographic writing (Richardson 1997) can be informed through and emphasis on performance. In this context, performance is conceptualized as mode of interaction that creatively gives expression and meaning to experience. As such, it provides a method for examining and analyzing this human action. As a mode of investigation and cultural interpretation, performance addresses the two central questions of ethnography: “What is going on here? and ‘What does it mean?” (Conquergood 1992, p. 87). According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), performance oriented approaches to culture “place a premium on the particularities of human action, on language as spoken, and on ritual as performed” (p. 75). Viewing ethnographic practices as “performances” of everyday life and situated social interactions, my interpretive schema is organized dramatistically (Burke 1989; Goffman 1959, 1967, 1980; Turner 1969).

Performance centered approaches to the study of social life draw attention to the staged, public nature of social behavior (Goffman 1959) while providing a
way of examining ethnographically social action in its naturalized and situated public contexts. However, I join Goodall, Burke, and Conquergood in viewing the Shakespearean phrase “life is a stage, and we are merely players” as a useful, but inadequate metaphor for social life. Goodall (2000) states that “dramatic action is the baseline for interpreting what people say and do. People act on the world, we just don’t move along with it. People create meanings, we just don’t receive them. We actively, sometimes mythically, imagine our lifewords. Then we walk, purposefully, and dramatically, into them” (p. 116). Individuals perform everyday life on the social stage, amongst the “scramble and wrangle of the human barnyard” (Burke 1950), but through these performances and interactions, individuals constitute the very roles and relationships that guide their behaviors. Alternatively, I see life as a constitutive and rhetorical accomplishment in which individuals actively interpret, process, and behave in response to the meanings that we make in the world. As an active process, individual to not merely enact their social roles and statue positions, but simultaneously make, remake, and potentially break them. If culture is an ongoing performance (Bruner, 1986), then performers “critically bring the spaces, meanings, ambiguities, and contradictions alive in their performances” (Conquergood 1989, p. 56). It is the goal of the ethnographer to examine and attempt to understand and make critical sense of these spaces, meanings, ambiguities, and contradictions for a more thorough and self-reflexive examination of social life. Highlighting the political and often rhetoric character of these cultural performances, Dwight Conquergood (1992) maps performance as the “borderlands terrain between ethnography and rhetoric.”
It is the “new frontier for staking joint claims to poetics and persuasion, pleasure and power, in the interests of community and critique, solidarity and resistance.” In contemporary Cultural Studies, performance is “now the commonplace, the nexus between the playful and the political” (p. 80).

Through his careful synthesis of this literature, Conquergood demonstrates that performance is conceptualized in numerous ways in the scholarly literature yet revolve around three common themes: imitation, construction, and dynamism. The first theme, imitation (or mimesis), is characterized by the work of Erving Goffman (1956) whereby performance is viewed as role playing or staged social interaction. For Goffman, people’s behaviors mimic or are guided through a set of prescribed social or cultural roles that they enact in everyday behavior and conversation. The second theme, construction (or poiesis), is characterized by the work of structural anthropologist Victor Turner, who views performance as “making not faking.” (Conquergood 1992; Turner 1982). Instead of enacting prescribed social roles or adhering to an already established social script, people make and remake the very social roles they enact through the agency of performance. For Turner, the very heart of culture is enacted through performance, an emergent and constructive process that highlights the agency of the performer to make and remake the social scripts to which they adhere in everyday life. The third theme, dynamism (or kinesis), highlights the productive capacities of performance as a “decentering agency of movement, intervention, transformation, struggle, and change.” Instead of the more passive “making not faking” of the performance as construction camp, this perspective views
performance more radically as “breaking and remaking” (Conquergood, 1992). Taken up my many strains of post-modernist, post-structuralist, and post-colonialist theory, this perspective views performance as always-already insinuate, interrupt, interrogate, and antagonize roles, structures, and social relationships to demonstrate that there is no standard script to which performers should adhere.

Though useful to distinguish between the competing themes, instead of privileging one body of performance literature over another in practice, I contend that performance be viewed as a dialectic between the competing forces of remaking and reifying social roles, scripts, and performances. As such, I neither deny the existence and power of social and cultural scripts and discourses (Foucault, 1977) nor do I discount the transformative and transgressive potential of social action. Instead, I see performance as an evolving and emergent discourse between dominant social values and the agency of performance. Individuals adhere to and perhaps reify well-established social and cultural scripts in and through their cultural performances, yet have the potential to make or perhaps remake or break these established cultural or social forms.

**Approach**

To canvass the polyglossic and polyvocal contour of the Rocky Mountain Bluegrass scene, I read this site through a “multi-level” (moving from the analysis of cultural texts to ethnography to macro-structural analysis) and “multi-modal” methodological frame (encompassing cultural texts, performances, ethnographic and empirical data, organizations, and discourses) that John Fiske (1991) refers to
as conjunctural interpretive analysis (p.455). Working from two linked definitions of culture- one a “whole way of life” (Williams 1958) and the other, “the generation and social circulation of meanings, pleasures, and values”- Fiske introduces an approach that identifies “the relationships between material conditions and cultural practices” (Fiske 1987; 1991, p.457). By handling “conjunctly much that is usually considered disjunctly” (Burke, 1935, p. 262), I bring together seemingly disparate texts to elevate their multiple points of convergence (and divergence).

Investigating bluegrass as both text and performance, in the following chapters, examine and draw from a wide selection of cultural texts (bluegrass song lyrics, fan websites, newspaper articles and photographs) and performances (bluegrass festivals, festival campsites, open jam sessions, and concerts). I situate these sites within the surrounding social, historical, and cultural context of the American West in light of the rapid growth and development along and within the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. By assembling and merging these cultural fragments, and investigating their multiple intersections, points of contact and routes of divergence, I aim to demonstrate the various ways in which bluegrass music is both a reaction and response to these trends.

Though I describe some events as they have happened in the past, I employ the use of the “ethnographic present” in my writing. Though some critique this approach as “romantically timeless” I aim to resist the danger of what Stuart Hall calls self enclosed approaches which, “valuing ‘tradition’ for its own sake, and treating it in an ahistorical manner, analyze cultural forms as if they
contained within themselves from their moment of origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value” (Hall 1981, p. 237). I use the ethnographic present primarily to retain the temporal flow of the narrative as most ethnographies "register apolitical and historical sensitivity to the circumstances of their fieldwork and their writing", (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p.108). Since I deal with historical as well as contemporary data, I wish to clarify that these responses reflect how people feel at the time of my writing and not some ambiguous past. The festival in the minds of its participants continues to exist from day to day and will for some time as they continue their participation in festival life. Its spaces and place exist in “real time” through the virtual performances of the festival in conversation, on-line chatting, telling of stories, and sharing of festival memories, and I aim to preserve this experience of the setting in my writing. I also see ethnographic writing and representation as performance, and wish to retain a sense of space and time by moving, at times, from past experience to present interaction with the festival site.

In this chapter, I mapped my ethnographic path that led me from casual listener of bluegrass music to full participant in the New West bluegrass scene. I described the methods that I employed throughout my research and discussed and grounded my ethnographic exploration of bluegrass life and culture in the study of performances of everyday life. In the next chapter, I explore the historical roots of bluegrass music and culture as they are situated in Appalachian cultural memory. I trace Appalachian history through the bluegrass song and explain the symbolic
associations of bluegrass music as they are appropriated in contemporary contexts for contemporary uses.
CHAPTER V:
BLUEGRASS AS SOURCE AND SYMBOL:
PLACE AND MEMORY IN BLUEGRASS MUSIC

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between bluegrass music and narratives of place. The rekindled interest in bluegrass and traditional American "roots" music draws heavily from the genre's well-established links to cultural memories and traditions associated with Old Appalachia. Confronting rapid and profound social and cultural change, early bluegrass musicians represented Appalachia as both an idyllic, pristine place of interpersonal warmth and community. Framing these images and constructions of place through the bluegrass song, the musicians created an oppositional set of discourses against the perceivably disruptive forces of modernization and urbanization. Throughout its long history, bluegrass music has appealed to listeners by articulating this tension between tradition and modernity through the mythical signification of Old Appalachia as a place untouched by the contaminating forces of modern, urban life. As such, bluegrass has continued to be a screen upon which listeners project their own sentiments about social and cultural change.

After defining my use of the concept in the context of this chapter, I examine "place" as it is constructed in bluegrass and traditional Appalachian music through a brief historical analysis of the cultural and social context surrounding the music's emergence. I explore the various ways that traditional bluegrass songs construct a sense of place through a lyrical analysis of a selection of traditional bluegrass songs. I situate these songs in their original social context
to explain how residents of Appalachia connected with the music as a site of Appalachian cultural memory when the region was experiencing rapid development. I follow with a discussion of the contemporary revival of American acoustic roots music and read its renewed interest as a longing for an established, rooted sense of history, tradition, and place in a world that is rapidly developing and changing.

Music, Memory, and Place

The appeal of music and place are inextricably linked. Music has a special capacity to transport its listeners to places in time and space that may not be immediately accessible through direct experience. Certain genres of music, especially those associated with a particular nation, culture, or region, have the ability to transmit to listeners a strong sense of nationalistic, regional, or local identity and a sense of place across cultural and geographical boundaries. According to cultural theorist Simon Frith (1996), music is “the cultural form best able to cross borders... and to define places” (125). Musical genres like Rap and Hip Hop, for example, evoke the life and culture of American inner cities and ghettos and “represent” their cities or boroughs of origin such as Compton, Brooklyn, or Watts through lyrics, lingo, and vocal style (Forman, 2000) while reggae and calypso can call into being the relaxed and festive imagery of island life in the Caribbean. Even individual instruments such as the as traditional Andean panpipe (Turino, 1993) or the sitar or tabla found in Indian Classical
music evoke strong images of landscape and place simply from the tonal qualities of the instrument.

The flow of music over and across borders also allows both musicians and listeners to experience a universe of "other" places with which they can identify or perhaps distance themselves. To be sure, however, these musics do not call into being stable or uniform readings of place. While Jamaica as represented in reggae music has been co-opted across college campuses by fraternities for its Rastafarian roots and rejoice of marijuana, others, for example read Jamaica through reggae music in quite different ways, primarily as a site of political struggle and liberation. A particular piece of music, therefore, can simultaneously call into being contradictory memories of a particular place or region. Individuals relate with these musical memories of place in very different ways when consumed or performed in very different contexts. Illustrative of the postmodern condition of musical performance and consumption, Frith (1996) reminds us that:

We live in an age of plunder in which musics made in one place for one reason can be immediately appropriated in another place for quite another reason... while music may be shaped by the people who first make and use it, as experience it has a life of its own (109).

Reading this musical appropriation through the lens of place illuminates the various ways in which individuals represent, form relationships with, and respond to particular places through the medium of music. Additionally, when appropriated by different people in different contexts, the music can take on an altogether set of meanings.
perhaps mythical, idyllic places in our collective, cultural memory. As a musical and cultural timepiece (see Kotarba 2003), rock n' roll, big band, or oldies music can take listeners back several years or decades to the sounds, experiences, and politics of their youth. The transportable qualities of music also makes it possible for individuals to tap into the sights, sounds, and landscapes of particular regions, places, or time periods to which they may not have direct access or experience. With traditional bluegrass and old time music, fans and casual listeners explain that its historical roots in the Appalachian frontier explain its growing appeal both in the New West and beyond. For these fans, the sound of the fiddle, mandolin, and five-string banjo conjure vivid symbols of the life and culture of Old Appalachia.

As a vivid construction of American popular memory, Old Appalachia constitutes an often-mythical region and time period characterized by genuine folk community and traditional homespun values guided by family, place, and rural living. For example, many fans like Barbara, a 49 year-old payroll manager, explain that their attraction to the music is that it provides a living link to our culture’s past. “I think that more and more people a realizing that Bluegrass and acoustic music is our heritage. Bluegrass and old time music is the way that our forefathers expressed themselves, told news of their families, carried news of current events, and even entertained themselves.” Other fans like Richie, a 51 year-old landscaper from Arkansas, state that they listen to bluegrass and participate in the festival life “to get back to what is real in our past and history,” or as Gene, a 45 year-old realtor and massage therapist, added in “appreciation of
more traditional ways of life.” Viewed from the present, these images simultaneously create and tap into the rich, idyllic landscape of the Appalachian Frontier and provide an ironic counterpart to modern life and culture. Bluegrass music and culture memorialize Appalachia and its associated values through its various practices, traditions, and narratives idealizing elements of rural, mountain folk culture that are feared to be lost or buried by trends of modernization and urbanization.

Although defined numerous ways by different scholars in different contexts, I view cultural memory as the process through which members of a collectivity come to remember and reflect upon their shared past. More than merely resuscitation or re-reading of a culture's history, this understanding of cultural memory describes how collectivities remember and memorialize events, tragedies, struggles, or histories that unite its members. These memories, however, often speak very different voices, stories, and discourses as they are recalled and appropriated by different members, for different purposes, and in shifting contexts. The concept of cultural memory is useful for examining how collectivities come to remember and reflect on their shared pasts. It aids us in interpreting how collectivities both remember and memorialize events, tragedies, struggles, histories, or other shared experiences that define common frames of experience by highlighting the motives underlying particular resuscitations and revisions of the past. As Maurice Halbwachs (1925) reminds us, memories of the past are always-already filtered through their collective, social frameworks--the particular cultural, historical and local milieu in which individuals are situated.
Constituted by a selective “paring” of history to aid in understanding and interpreting contemporary problems, issues and crises (Assmann 1995; Ben-Amos and Weissberg, 1999), cultural memory highlights the human motives underlying particular resuscitations and revisions of the past and situates these readings in the social context in which they emerge.

Nations, groups, and individuals work hard in preserving the stories, histories, and traditions of their culture’s or group’s past. This motivation reflects awareness that without conscious efforts to remember and memorialize their past, these markers of cultural heritage and identity could be irrevocably lost. This interest also reflects that certain critical events and stories of the past— including triumphs, struggles, and tragedies— play a critical role in how members of a particular culture come to understand their own place in history, their identity, and perhaps even their own membership in (or exile from) this culture. Pierre Nora argues that individuals seldom have direct experience with the events of a nation’s or group’s past. They therefore replace *milieux de memorie*, the real, lived “environments in which experience and recollection can take place” with *lieux de memorie*, sites of memory within which collective memory settles and crystallizes and upon which are layered selective and partial “rememorations” of the past. In the contemporary period, the dissolution of historical grand narratives (Lyotard 1984) has left their “odd residue” in these *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1996; Ben-Amos and Weissberg 1999, p.17), which allows these sites and symbols of memory to carry multiple readings in multiple contexts. Moving from grand narratives of history to cultural memory, Nora draws attention to the uses and
performances of the past within the theaters of the present and thus posits a "new kind of history":

...a history less interested in causes than effects; less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interaction of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time, in the disappearance and reemergence of their significations; less interested in 'what actually happened' than in its perpetual reuse and misuse; its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on. In short, a history that is neither a resurrection nor a reconstitution nor a reconstruction nor even a representation but, in the strongest possible sense, a 'rememoration' — a history that is interested in memory not as a rememberance but as the overall structure of the past within the present...

(Nora, 1996).

When resuscitated for present purposes in a present context, memories of the past mingle with narratives of the present, thus highlighting the emergent and contingent nature of cultural memory. Drawing from Nora, I read bluegrass music as a site of memory through which images of Old West and Old Appalachia are "rememorated" and appropriated in contemporary New West contexts. As a node for community life and identity, William Kingston (1988) explains that vernacular traditions such as bluegrass and old time music, though often both neglected and
appropriated by mass culture, provide symbols for communal spirit. He explains that:

vernacular, regional, or local traditions... even though they often form the roots of many mass popular genres, are on the one hand neglected and even discarded, while on the other exploited and devoured by the dominant mass culture. Despite neglect and exploitation, local and regional traditions still symbolize and sustain many communities. Each ballad, blues, fiddle tune, hymn, or dance form reaffirms communal spirit and builds pride. As these regional traditions honor the past, they also respond to dynamic and constant change – they are never static (p. 5).

As such, the symbols of Appalachia, when used and appropriated in a New West context, draw from cultural memories of a distant yet celebrated past and assemble them in ways that reflect a changing cultural context and respond to the needs of altogether different communities.

**The Invention of Appalachia**

As a socio-political region\(^{13}\), Appalachia stretches southward from Kentucky and West Virginia through North Georgia and westward toward the Mississippi River and the Ozark mountain range. As a vital site of American history and folklore, the region is, as Alan Batteau (1990) reads it, more a literary and political invention of the urban imagination than a geographical discovery. He argues that the Appalachia of fiction, journalism, and public policy is driven

\(^{13}\)Geographically, the Appalachian mountain range stretches from northern Georgia to western Maine, however Appalachia, as a cultural and socio-political entity is typically bound by the northern edges of Kentucky and West Virginia running southward into Northern Georgia.
more by the needs and interests of urban outsiders, drawing on the “imagery and motivations that a generation ago transfixed an affluent society that sent legions of poverty warriors into the hills.” Richard Peterson (1997) links this attraction of Appalachia to the seemingly unspoiled and isolated people of the region who were idealized and celebrated as “purely” American and removed from the debaucheries of city life. Peterson writes

The concept of Appalachia as pristine remnant of a bygone natural environment peopled by British American stock, unspoiled by the modernist thrust of urbanization and industrialization, was a self-serving contrivance of the latter third of the nineteenth century. Descriptions of the region were used either to highlight the improvements of civilization or to show its depravity in despoiling pristine nature; to identity its residents as noble relics of Elizabethan England or debauched by contact with the wrong outside influences… (p. 215).

The people and landscape represented in and through early country and bluegrass music is therefore an “imaginary country” which individuals have used for decades to compare and contrast the perceived ills of modern life and lifestyles. Appalachia, Robert Cantwell (1984) writes, is “the only region from which country music has ever really come. Situated in a historical fastness that prolonged national meditation has engendered out of the old rural South, “traditional music,” he explains,

whose very nature is to assimilate and transfigure, according to its own slowchanging aesthetic, the sounds of the civilization around it, had freed
the past from Time, setting it forth into an imaginary country in which innumerable epochs and ways of life thrive together... The evocative and often archaic sounds of rural music and rural voices also made their way into the urban imagination, where, catapulted over vast distances and decisively severed from its cultural setting, it could evoke a fresh response, one which might partake of the listener's own desires and fancies, and permit him accept and even relish what he might otherwise reject (p. 18, 44).

In this fashion, Appalachia as a symbol constructed and performed outside of the region becomes decoupled from its historical and geographical roots and takes shape from the particular interests and desires of the listener or consumer. By cultivating an imagery of lost ways of life, early country string band music provided a "rustic alternative to urban modernity... It was country to their city, the unchanging past to the rapidly changing present" and conjured images of "a place uncontaminated by urban-industrial society and peopled by unchanging descendants of Daniel Boone-like old-time folk..." (Peterson 1997, p. 55-58). The themes and images of displacement in these bluegrass songs are articulated in sharp juxtaposition to the perceived negative aspects of modern, urban life. These themes of lost sense of place, landscape, and home suggest a romantic reaction against modernity, and portray mountain life as a place of interpersonal warmth in comparison to the impersonal relations of city life (Sweet 1991).

In the New West, the individuals' consumption and performance of bluegrass music fuses the imagery and mythology of Old Appalachia and Old
West in ways that create novel and idealized symbols of community life. Drawing from Kenneth Burke’s distinction between poetic and semantic meaning (Burke 1941, p. 138), Batteau argues for a poetic and symbolic reading of Appalachia by examining its “invention” through various texts and performances of literature and culture. I take from Batteau’s reading an understanding of Old Appalachia as a symbolic form that conjures vivid imagery of simple, rural folk life and articulates tensions between the values of civilization and progress versus home, family, and community. A symbolic form that plays itself out in the public sphere as social drama (Batteau 1990, p.196), Old Appalachia as a site of cultural memory constitutes a time, place and people both isolated from and displaced by the throes of modernization. In the contemporary period, these images and memories provide a public with a familiar referent through which they can interpret and respond to similar tensions in their own lives and communities. In Burke’s terms, these forms contain “attitudes” toward the past and present (and perhaps future) that orient subsequent programs of action in response to these tensions.

Through their lived experiences, early bluegrass musicians articulated a symbolic set of places and landscapes to which their mostly urban audiences could identify, especially those who were, like many of the musicians, displaced Appalachians. In the following section, I examine the relationship between bluegrass music and place and discuss how and why these images appealed to a growing population of urban émigrés in the early days of this musical form.
Bluegrass Music and Place

Before the rise of Bluegrass in the 1940s, Appalachian string band music tapped into a large stock of songs, hymns, ballads, melodies, and musical styles that were passed along from generation to generation and from place to place through both oral and aural tradition. The vast collection of traditional Appalachian and Scotts-Irish folk tunes circulating within the Appalachian region took on different shapes as they were performed and incorporated into the unique cultural landscapes of different, isolated mountain hollows and communities. Each distinct region provided its own unique interpretation of these traditional songs and musical styles, which branded a particular marker of place in and through the music. In these geographically and often socially isolated communities, particular banjo or fiddle styles, modes and methods of harmonizing, and vocal stylings melded with secular and religious influences to create distinct musical forms. As such, these unique musical traditions became strong markers of place and tradition within Appalachia itself as they articulated a rootedness within, and a cultural referent for a particular social, cultural, and environmental landscape. Even particular fiddle or banjo styles became synonymous with particular regions or even individual mountain villages.

Many of these early traditional folk songs were also linked to actually places in the homeland of Scotland, Wales, Ireland, or Great Britain and referenced particular places like the Scottish city in the “Flowers of Edinburgh.” Through lyric and melody, and in form and content, these traditional folk songs provided early Appalachian settlers with musical pieces that they could play and
pass on in commemoration of the places they left behind. The importance of memorializing place in many traditional songs and fiddle tunes therefore emerged not only out of attachments to place and subsequent experiences of physical, spatial, and cultural displacement.

Growing from these early traditions, the string band music that would soon become known as “bluegrass” adopted many of these early melodies and musical conventions and “invented” new traditions from the existing stock of themes. New songs began to emerge that referenced the physical geography of home places or markers of landscape that filled the Appalachian countryside. For example, an impressive repertoire of instrumental fiddle tunes bear the names of particular places, landscapes, or geographical features. Instrumental tunes bluegrass like Salt Creek, Jerusalem Ridge, Clinch Mountain Backstep, Daybreak in Dixie, Ashland Breakdown, Shenandoah Valley Breakdown, Roanoke, Sugarloaf Mountain, Big Sandy River, and Foggy Mountain Special memorialized the feelings and emotions associated with a particular regional geography and landscape through melody, tone, and tempo. As such, they became markers of musical memory for these places each time they were played or passed along through oral tradition.

Lyrically, early bluegrass musicians would perform the traditional repertoire of early folk songs and ballads or perhaps extend their themes by writing new lyrics, verses, or choruses that developed into unique songs of their own. Many traditional bluegrass vocal numbers share a similar emphasis on place, but in this case are those actually described or written into the lyrics. Songs such
as I'm Going Back to Old Kentucky, Eight More Miles to Louisville, Blue Ridge Mountain Home, Blue Moon of Kentucky, My Little Georgia Rose, My Old Kentucky Home, Cabin in the Hills of Caroline, and The Old Kentucky Shore describe sometimes in great detail, the physical or geographical hills, mountains, creeks, streams, the social relationships of families, friends, or kinfolk, and the emotional pains, joys, sorrows, longings they had for these places. Melodically, these performers borrowed the phrasing and instrumental style of the traditional folk tunes, and arranged them in ways that painted an aural landscape of the Appalachian mountain culture. Though seldom overtly political, their lyrics alluded to their experience of the region's rapid and profound disruption, displacement, and change. While many musicians explicitly articulated these themes and tensions in the lyrics of their music, others simply memorialized idyllic representations of these home places and landscapes through melodic or lyrical celebrations of their mountain homes, hollows, or communities. This recurring emphasis on home and place in bluegrass music became especially important as the rapid growth, development, and mineral extraction disrupted and forever changed the places in which they lived.

**Old Appalachia and Rapid Social Change**

Though often associated with rural Appalachian folk life, bluegrass music was a commercial form of popular music that appealed audiences who left for the

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14 Even songs like Molly and Tenbrooks (a song about two Kentucky Racehorses), and Uncle Penn (a song about Monroe's fiddlin' uncle Penn Vandiver with who Monroe lived after his parents perished and who performed barn dances and community festivals), describe actual persons or characters associated with a specific geographical locale.
economic advantages of the city or were displaced from their mountain hollows and bankrupt farms during the Great Depression. As economic conditions worsened, many individuals left their home places mountain communities to find work in the textile mills in the larger cities and towns. Others were forced to leave the mountain region altogether for the better economic opportunities in the factories of Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. The highly polished and streamlined musical style of early bluegrass music appealed to these new urban audiences yet referenced the rural social and cultural world to which they longed to return. The music tapped into familiar themes and traditions associated with rural Appalachia but did so in a way that was always-already packaged and performed for more sophisticated urban audiences. The music themes articulated themes that resonated with urban émigrés who felt a longing for lost home, family, or love left behind when they moved to the city. As a popular entertainment of the time, these songs symbolized for many the deeply held places, traditions, and ways of living that were fading from direct experience.

When rapid industrialization ravaged the Appalachian frontier, entire hollows were plowed over to make way for extensive rail systems, or were laid bare by deforestation. Economic deterioration forced many family farms out of business, pushing many young men to the industrialized north to support their families or alone, merely to "ramble" and experience the intrigue and mystery of city life. As the banks and government sold acres of land holdings to northern-based entrepreneurs and corporations for coal and timber extraction, miles of rail line were laid through existing hollows and communities. These once isolated
mountain hollows became a hotbed of commercial development and the places that poor mountaineers once called home were changing drastically day by day. Drawn to the cities and towns by the fortune and prosperity that the new mills and mines were promised to bring, many of the mountain dwellers sold their land holdings and forever lost their homes and home places as satirized in 1926 by Gastonia, North Carolina mill worker Dave McCarn’s “Cotton Mill Colic No. 3” (Wisnant 1983, p. 7, Roscigno and Danaher, 2004)

Lots of people with a good free will
Sold their homes and moved to the mill.
We’ll have lots of money they said,
But everyone got hell instead.
It was fun in the mountains rolling logs,
But now when the whistle blows we run like dogs.

CHORUS:
It suits us people and serves them fine
For thinking that the mill was a darn goldmine.

Songs such as these provided displaced mountaineers and mill workers a voice through which they could understand and cope with their present conditions and became the “voice” of southern labor around which the Piedmont and other labor strikes revolved (Roscigno and Danaher, 2004). As a social outlet for dissatisfied mine and mill workers, these songs were often performed by impromptu string band groups at union meetings and other gatherings. Early bluegrass musicians like Bill Monroe got their start singing and playing in these informal groups, which provided a circuit of venues and events that allowed these musicians to make a basic living from their craft (or at least a square meal as many musicians were paid in kind with food or other supplies). Especially when
working conditions and harsh Appalachian life sent droves of workers to the factories in the north for better pay and union representation, these informal social networks allowed these workers to play music on the side for extra money or to abandon factory and mill work altogether for a life on tour.

As bluegrass musicians and fans moved beyond the boundaries of Appalachia, bluegrass music began to articulate a deep and generalized tension between the forces of urbanization and the values of rural life. Growing out of a set of ritualized social practices that made up a significant part of the religious and cultural worlds of the Appalachian people, traditional bluegrass music carried and conveyed the issues and struggles through which they traversed. Always oriented to the past rather than present or future, bluegrass and its longing, pining themes reflected a region and a people nostalgic for way of life that was being lost to modernization and industrial progress. The secular themes of bluegrass, often contained references to home, family, failed romantic relationships, and economic hardship, as reflected the lived experiences of both listeners and performers.

Musicians who left their home places either wrote or sought out songs written in memory of the places and relationships they left behind. For example, the song “I’m On My Way Back to the Old Home” describes a self-reflective Bill Monroe “whose childhood days were over,” because he “had to leave (his) home” to seek employment in the factories of Gary, Indiana. The verses and chorus are sung as followed:

Back in the days of my childhood,  
In the evening when everything was still,  
I used to sit and listen to the foxhounds,  
With my dad in the old Kentucky hills.
Soon my childhood days were over,
I had to leave my home,
Mother and Dad were called to heaven,
Now I'm left in this world all alone.

High in the hills of old Kentucky,
There's a fond spot that's in my memory.
I'm on my way back to the old home,
The light in the window I long to see.

Chorus:
I'm on my way back to the old home,
The road winds on up the hill,
But there's no light in the window,
That shined long ago where I lived.

Through these lyrics, Monroe captures the experience of many native Appalachians who were either displaced from their farms or homeland due to economic circumstances or left to find work and support their mother and father or perhaps their fledgling families—many of whom stayed to raise children to protect the family's land holdings. Another example illustrates how the early bluegrass songs became a coping mechanism for those forced to leave their homes.

In My Old Kentucky Home, Stephen Foster writes of a subject who bids good night to his old Kentucky home and pines for the place he and his family and neighbors had to leave when "hard times came a-knockin."

The sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home
'Tis summer, the folks there are gay
The corn top's ripe and the meadow's in bloom
While the birds make music all the day

Chorus:
So weep no more, my lady
Oh, weep no more, today
We'll sing one song for the old Kentucky home
For my old Kentucky home far away

The young folks roll on the little cabin floor
All merry, all happy and bright
By 'n by hard times come a-knocking at the door
Then my old Kentucky home good night.

They hunt no more for the 'possum and the coon
On meadow, the hill and the shore
They sing no more by the glimmer of the moon
On the bench by that old cabin door

The head must bow and the back will have to bend
Wherever the poor folks may go
A few more days and the trouble will end
In the field where sugar-canes may grow

A few more days for to tote the weary load
No matter, 'twill never be light
A few more days till we totter on the road
Then my old Kentucky home, good night.

In this song, Kentucky is described as a place with which the subject had intimate connections and relationships. However, when hard times forced the subject, his love, and his other friends and neighbors “far away,” Kentucky became an idyllic place that existed only in his memory. The easy, simple, community life celebrated in “Old Kentucky” was given up for the toil and drudgery of hard labor in the fields. Though written in 1853, the song became a point of identification with place and displacement for the scores of Appalachians, who were forced to leave their home places, kin, and community in search of employment, as the song became a regularly performed song in the bluegrass repertoire.

Another traditional bluegrass standard, “The Old Home Place” written by Mitch Jayne of The Dillards mirrors numerous other bluegrass songs which
articulate a longing for one’s long, lost home but in his absence, the place in his memory is no more:

It’s been ten long years, since I left my home,
And the hollow where I was born.
Where the cool fall nights, made the wood smoke rise
And the foxhunter blew his horn

I fell in love with a girl from the town
I thought that she would be true
I ran away to Charlottesville
And worked in a sawmill or two

Chorus:
What have they done to the old home place,
Why did they tear it down?
And why did I leave the plow in the field,
And look for a job in the town?

Well, my girl ran off with somebody else
And the tariffs they took all my pay
And here I stand where the old home stood
Before they took it away
...

Again, the singing subject pines for a home (and love) that is irrevocably lost during the time that he is away working in the factories in Charlottesville, illustrating a common theme of lost home and sense of place when the subject was forced to move, left to ramble, or when the home place itself was destroyed or sold.

Although a strong marker of place is branded or inscribed within the music itself, the semiotic power of bluegrass comes from that fact that its performance is simultaneously placeless, nameless, and generalized so that others clearly and closely identify despite not being from or having directly experienced the region or place itself. Others seeking a place or set of images with which to
identify, can find in bluegrass the lyrical, visual and performative markers of place they can identify and remember or into which they can escape. Lyrically, bluegrass music articulated the tensions and conflicts of its listeners by tapping into a set of common, core experiences of human beings in general. Frank, a 52 year-old Colorado resident who spends his free time playing guitar and mandolin stated that the “universal” appeal of bluegrass was linked to its simple lyrics, and pointed out why it elicited such broad appeal. He adds:

The lyrics tend to be very simple, and based on ‘everyman’s’ (sic) common experience... lost love, a lost sense of home and place, a search for a simple, happy life; they tend to be universal human themes ... This makes bluegrass so easy to relate to.

Frank explained that common themes running throughout bluegrass music— the disappearance of the “old home place” or an uprooting from one’s home community or place of childhood— resonated with people’s experience living in today’s “soulless” and “community starved” society. Even though a listener may not be from Charlottesville, Old Kentucky, or the Clinch Mountains, the “universal” themes of love, heartbreak, rambling and remorse coupled with seemingly anonymous hills, valleys, and countryside allow the music to speak both specifically and generally about both specific and generalized places.

By constructing a discursive sense of home and place through the song lyrics, bluegrass music set into circulation images of the community and family disruption engendered by the larger social and economic changes occurring within Appalachia. Reactions to modernization, change, and other outside influences became dominant themes of bluegrass music as Appalachia was confronted with
adapting to the growth and expansion of resource extraction and the large-scale capitalist investment in interstate commerce—forces which brought rail, mining, and large-scale factory farming into this once relatively isolated and settled region. Often, bluegrass songwriters would construct their place of origin as “paradise” in contrast to the hell that it had ultimately become. Though written much later in retrospect, the popular bluegrass song “Paradise” by folk artist John Prine juxtaposes the original, unspoiled town of Paradise, Kentucky with the blighted landscape that it would soon become.

When I was a child my family would travel Down to Western Kentucky where my parents were born And there’s a backwards old town that’s often remembered So many times that my memories are worn.

Chorus: And daddy won’t you take me back to Muhlenberg county Down by the Green River where Paradise lay Well, I’m sorry my son, but you’re too late in asking Mister Peabody’s coal train has hauled it away

Well, sometimes we’d travel right down the Green River To the abandoned old prison down by Adrie Hill Where the air smelled like snakes that we’d shoot with our pistols But empty pop bottles was all we would kill.

Then the coal company came with the world’s largest shovel And they tortured the timber and stripped all the land Well, they dug for their coal till the land was forsaken Then they wrote it all down as the progress of man.

When I die let my ashes float down the green river Let my soul roll on up to the Rochester Dam I’ll be halfway to heaven with Paradise waitin’ Just five miles away from wherever I am.

Probably the most overtly political in the bluegrass repertoire, *Paradise* encapsulates the strong attachment to place common in many other bluegrass
songs, and describes the memories to which the singing subject attaches to these places when the physical place has irrevocably changed.

As a dominant theme running through Bluegrass music, Mayne Smith (1991) argues that others who feel displaced from their own region or place often appropriate its vivid imagery of displacement. Smith writes:

There are many who see bluegrass as a product of exile from the country—deriving not from rural life but from a yearning for it, and with its audience made up largely of people who share a romantic nostalgia for country living, whether or not they have ever experienced it (p.36).

For individuals living “outside of Appalachia,” bluegrass music “represents Appalachia as a place where the past is attainable in the present” (Sweet 1991, p.34).

As a vivid construction of American popular memory, Appalachia of old is emplaced through bluegrass music as a region and time characterized by genuine folk community and traditional homespun values guided by family, place, and rural living. Although the music grew out of a set of social experiences common to those living within depression era Appalachia, the mythical world contrived by the themes of longing, pining, and lonely reminiscence, the only access we have to this life is at the level of myth and memory. The idyllic world of the bluegrass lyricist is one that has few positive referents in the lived realities of this time period, because the recreation is necessarily a selective one. In fact, when many of these lyrics were written and recorded, much of the countryside was already under development, the cities and towns were thoroughly urbanized,
and economic blight had been widespread for decades. When bluegrass music was emerging as a distinct cultural form in the 1940s and 50s, Appalachia of old, as recast in traditional bluegrass song lyrics and traditional bluegrass imagery, indeed already passed from direct experience for many of its residents.

Regardless of their historical accuracy, viewed from the present, these musical images simultaneously create and tap into the rich, idyllic landscape of the Appalachian Frontier and provide an ironic counterpart to modern living, usually as experienced through urban or suburban life. With its “gaze fixed wistfully upon old times,” Cantwell (1984) explains, bluegrass music “is the perfect expression of an economically ascendant, but culturally uprooted, people, reinterpreting the rural ethos, to which it has no intrinsic connection, in politically and socially conservative terms more typical of the suburban tract than of the coal company town or mountain farm (p. 7-8). Though country and bluegrass music “was born of the trauma of rural people’s adjustment to industrial society,” Tony Scherman (1994) argues “that fight has been fought... Severed from its working class origins, country music is becoming a refuge for culturally homeless Americans everywhere. (p. 55, 57). Though I disagree that the struggle over adjustment to industrial society (or its incipient decline) has already been fought, bluegrass music continues to provide its culturally displaced or misplaced listeners a refuge from and a way to cope with and understand modern social problems and concerns.
The Search for Place in Contemporary Bluegrass Music

As bluegrass evolved throughout the 1950s and 1960s with a shifting of styles and line-up changes from the pioneering string bands, bluegrass music traversed what would be a continual evolution and transformation of the musical and cultural referent that is “bluegrass.” As technology began to seep into the roots of traditional country and bluegrass music, the phonograph record, and growing television and radio coverage diffused bluegrass beyond the boundaries of the Appalachian frontier. As traditional bluegrass music became incorporated increasingly into non-traditional forms and arrangements, subtlety but profoundly the bluegrass sound began to change and evolve (see Rosenberg, 1985; 1993b). Shortly after Nashville began to market bluegrass to a mass audience, Elvis Presley and other electronically mediated rock and country styles rendered bluegrass’ hayseed image and acoustic sound old fashioned and obsolete, returning it to the margins of the musical world. However, in the late 1960s and 70s, bluegrass was re-introduced to mainstream popular culture through such films as Deliverence with its famous “dueling banjos” scene, the chase scenes of the gangster movie “Bonnie and Clyde,” and of course Flatt and Scruggs familiar recording of the “Beverley Hillbillies” theme song (Carney 1974). Once these sounds and images began to circulate into mass mediated society and culture, performers of bluegrass folk traditions had limited control over the forms to which the appropriation of bluegrass music would take as the bluegrass sound and style were mediated to mass society.
The use and appropriation of the bluegrass signifier, however, continued to take on a special significance as a symbol of rural American life and the distinct cultural heritage of the Appalachian folk. In his essay on the representation of Appalachian culture through television, Horace Newcomb (1980) explores the uses and functions that these images perform when consumed by people outside of Appalachia. As a “metaphor for what is rural in America,” referring to “hillbilly lifestyle, wherever it happens to exist,” these images explore a “region of the American mind” rather than a specific place or region in American cultural geography (p. 317). As bluegrass music spread beyond the boundaries of Appalachia, the “hillbilly” (Harkins 2004) and his music were increasingly used in and through popular culture as both a site of identification and cultural distance. Consuming the image “took people back” to a simpler time, a place in American cultural memory, yet provided a stark contrast and place of comparison for the perceived superiority of modern living. By expressing a set of codes, values, and attitudes associated with hillbilly and rural life, shows like Hee Haw, the Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres, and other such programs united hillbilly imagery with bluegrass music to enact plots and circulate images revolving around a deep conflict between basic American values. The message of these images, according to Newcomb, posits the moral superiority of rural wisdom—“virtues of a good heart, simple living, honest value, and complex insight into human nature”—illustrating that “we,” the city dwellers and those adopting the values and lifestyles of modern society, are the one’s with a “deficient value structure” (p. 323). Using Appalachian culture as “the screen on
which we project our own desires for innocence.... for paradises before the introduction of evil,” and portraying mountain life as a place of interpersonal warmth in comparison to the impersonal relations of city life (Sweet 1991), individuals and groups use these images and representations to experience in the “real” world that which has been or is threatened to be lost, buried, or destroyed by modern “progress” (p.324).

Written in 1967 by country songwriters Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, and made popular by the Osborne Brothers, the song “Rocky Top,” articulates this tension. The song constructs the imaginary Rocky Top Tennessee as a mythical place that exists in contrast to the ills and complexities associated with modern living. It is an imaginary place that will always be, in the words of the chorus, “home sweet home to me.” Two of the verses are sung as such:

I wish that I was on old Rocky Top,
Down in the Tennessee hills.
Ain’t no smoggy smoke on Rocky Top
Ain’t no telephone bills.

I’ve had years of pent up city life,
Trapped like a duck in a pen,
All I know is it’s a pity
Life can’t be simple again.

Chorus:
Rocky Top, you’ll always be
Home sweet home to me...

Securing it’s meaning through ironic juxtaposition of rural and urban, the song references a world that the mythical “Rocky Top” is not: polluted, complex, and confining. By constructing an ironic counterpart, life outside of Rocky Top, the song calls into being a symbolic place that serves as a refuge and a retreat from
the ills of city living. Although referencing a place that does not physically exist, the mythical imagery of “Rocky Top, Tennessee” is appropriated and performed to express dissatisfaction for these ills as they are experienced virtually anywhere, whether it be Tennessee, Kentucky, Colorado, or perhaps even Toronto or Taipei.

As mentioned above, the nostalgic mythos of bluegrass music projects, in retrospect, images of an idyllic and romanticized rural life where relationships are pure, families and communities are tightly knit, set to the backdrop of a countryside is untainted and undeveloped, where rolling hills constitute wide open spaces for personal freedom and adventure. Compared to the growing pollution, development, and decay associated with many urban areas a mythical trip back to paradise was a welcome image created through alternative musical subcultures.

“Home Sweet Home Revisited,” a song written in the mid 1970s by country musician Rodney Crowell, and performed by and incorporated into the bluegrass repertoire the progressive bluegrass band *J.D. Crowe and the New South* implicitly captures this sense of longing for a time and a place untouched by the ills of urbanization:

The old hometown is sure in trouble,
Looks like it must have doubled
In sin and size, since I’ve been gone.
City streets of drunks and junk and stones,
A heaven made a hell they call my home.

Chorus:
Now its gone like the life of a child,
When it turns its back on your mind.
Tomorrow has no home sweet home,
Look what they’ve done to mine,
It just faded into time.
For the singing subject, "home sweet home" becomes a referent no longer accessible through direct experience. "Fading into time," the old hometown becomes preserved and memorialized in and through the lyrics of the song.

As illustrated, the folk revival of the 1960s and 70s drew a lot of fans back into the genre as listeners and performers. In their revival of these fading traditions, many these performers necessarily changed the genre by incorporating jazz, rock and roll, blues, commercial country, and other folk traditions into the bluegrass mold (Rosenberg 1985). Despite making significant contributions to this growing and evolving tradition, many new songwriters continued to echo the early themes of displacement, home, and community life in the bluegrass song.

**Bluegrass Music and The Growth of the New American West**

By appropriating the imagery and values associated with rural Appalachian culture, these mythical depictions function in many ways to reflect conflicts and struggles between changing and often incompatible ways of life. The import of these images lie in their ability to reference "Old Appalachia" while simultaneously referring to rural mountain culture in general, wherever it may take place: the Appalachian Frontier, the Ozarks, Beverly Hills, California, or the Rocky Mountains. In this light, the modern fascination with bluegrass music in the American West reflects a reaction to the changing contour of the American West, especially the growth and development of the Front Range region of the Rocky Mountains.
The resuscitation of these histories, narratives, and values in the Rocky Mountain bluegrass boom signifies a growing realization that, as a society, we are facing similar pressures through relentless urban sprawl, degradation of environment and landscape, and a relative dislocation from our fellow neighbors. This shift tells us much about our fascination with the past- our memories, histories, and stories of the past- as well as our present and future- our dreams, our hopes, and our aspirations. Especially in light of the recent social upheaval surrounding the events of 9/11 and the impending war on terrorism, people explain that bluegrass music provides some solace in an increasingly complex and hurried world. The dominant themes of antiquity and simplicity, traditional homespun values of family, home, and religion, and the implicit critique of modernization and progress found throughout the music resonate with a growing number of bluegrass fans. Through bluegrass, people are voicing their dissatisfaction with the faced paced modern life as well as increasingly “plastic” and inauthentic mainstream cultural offerings. Instead, a growing group of fans are seeking out cultural forms with “meaning” and “soul.” They are seeking cultural offerings with a history- a real, authentic story about real people, real lives, and real experiences. In the process, they are sending a strong message of opposition to the hurried and frantic life that confronts many of us today.

Motivated by similar longings, dreams, and aspirations of those originally drawn to the American West, contemporary residents and settlers of the New West seek refuge from the rapid urbanization taking place elsewhere. Historian Richard Aquila (1996) links the popular identification with and migration toward
the New West to the continued, mythical appeal of the Old West. Aquilla argues that the mythic West “provided a clear national identity during rapidly changing times” (p.196-97) for many Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mythic imagery of the west also served as a “psychological safety valve offering idyllic, rural settings and vicarious thrills for those working and living in urban areas” (p.196-97). Dissatisfied with the urban decay, crime and general loss of community ties, easterners and mid-westerners were drawn to the post-war west because it carried with it a “vision of the U.S. as a pastoral, idyllic nation that promoted opportunity, freedom, and justice for all” and thus “continued to appeal to Americans experiencing the urbanization, industrialization, and alienation of modern times.” (p.196-97). In much the same way that the imagery and mythology of Old Appalachia provide a glorification of the rural life, the West continues to provide such a grounding for those living both within and outside of its borders. As Lujek argues, a seemingly endless land of opportunity, the West remains another chance, “an escape hatch from the problems besetting the overpopulated urban east” (Lujek, 1991).

The mythologies and images of the wild, open, endless Old West, however, fly in stark contrast to the growth and sprawling development characterizing much of the urban New West. Its growth and popularity of introduced new people, cultures and lifestyles to the region, and thus displaced both physically and spiritually many native westerners from of the spaces and places they once resided. These previously “wide-open” spaces were becoming increasingly populated with shopping centers, office parks, and suburban
developments along the Front Range and plains and by resort hotels, winter recreation parks, and million dollar vacation homes in the mountain areas. Between the years of 1990-94, of the twenty fastest growing U.S. counties, 13 of the twenty were within the Rocky Mountain West, 7 of which were within in the state of Colorado (p.19). Before World War II, although “little more than half of all westerners lived in cities, today 86 percent reside in metropolitan areas” (p.69).

Mirroring the disruption of and plowing under of the communities and “hollows” during the development of the first, Appalachian frontier, the second western frontier is currently experiencing rapid change in its physical and cultural landscape. Towns that one held comfortably a few hundred or thousand residents now face encroachment by commercial and residential development, and the once wide and rolling prairie now accommodates large shopping, business, and residential complexes. Much like the Appalachian settlers of old, the residents of the west are finding their communities, towns, and landscapes changing rapidly and displacing certain markers of regional and place identity. Though the world of the New West is far different than the ones inhabited by both the rural and urban communities making up the social world of early bluegrass audiences, contemporary fans continue to use the music as a mythical escape from the perceived ills of modern living.

Throughout its seventy-year history, Bluegrass music and culture have always constructed a mythical portrayal of Appalachian life to cope with forces of modernization, commercialization, and mass culture, the themes of which are
inscribed within the lyrics, imagery and culture of bluegrass music of yesterday and today. In this New West setting, bluegrass draws from the contemporary myths of Appalachia and the Old West image to provide a romantic alternative to development, urban sprawl, and the loss of community. With its always-already nostalgic orientation, its reminiscence for a idyllic past, and reflection on the fading simplicity of the “old home place,” bluegrass music merges with the natural splendor, wide open spaces, and the “wildness” of the Old West. In this way, bluegrass creates a mythical universe to which individuals identify and relate in their enactment of New West culture, providing an escape from the problems associated with rapid urbanization. Operating simultaneously as a space of resistance to disappearing community spaces and a source of hegemonic constraint to profound social change, bluegrass provides a set of nostalgic references and recollections that “respond to human longings, yet mediate and manage them in ways that diminish many associated discomforts” (Pratt 1989, p. 64).

Another less widely circulated bluegrass song penned more recently by Colorado’s Yonder Mountain String Band describes a similar juxtaposition between mountain and city lifestyles. Their song “Traffic Jam” describes the singing subject sitting atop a mountain, pondering the chaos and confusion of a typical rush hour traffic snarl in the valley down below:

I'm sitting on a hilltop
looking at a traffic jam
laughing at the people as they
drive as fast as they can
But 5 miles an hour
won't get them very far....
they'll still be sitting in their cars.

I'm sitting on a hilltop
looking at the rush hour crowd.
The words that they're yelling
have got to make their mama's proud.
But at the rate they're going
it's gonna be about a year...
before they get to second gear.

I'm sitting on a hilltop
looking at the city move.
It makes a lot of noise but it
can't seem to find a groove.
If people took my advice
they'd try to slow things down...
and stop and take a look around.

They'd see me sitting on a hilltop
looking at them look at me.
They'd see a smile on my face and
my hair blowing in the breeze.
and maybe just one of them would
stop and say hello...
and sit awhile before they go.

By creating tension and friction between city and mountain life physically, culturally, and temporally, the lyrics paint a stark juxtaposition between the vertiginous pace and chaos of city life and the calm, natural, simple life in the mountains. Explaining why he wrote and continues to perform this song, songwriter Ben Kaufman explains “the more sprawl and crap that goes up in and around the (Front Range) area, the more I like singing this song, and the happier I am that I live in (a mountain town).”

Although not always overtly political, bluegrass music does have political implications. In stark contrast to the hustle and bustle and intensity of urban settings and the seclusion and homogenization of suburban life, these mythical
images provide a site of identification for those dissatisfied with the limited cultural and social spaces available for simple, organic, communal life. In this light, the world constructed discursively through bluegrass lyrics becomes one of many beckoning worlds (Nusbaum 1993 p.215), and thus provides a romantic alternative to the problematics of modern urban and suburban life.

Clarence, a banjo player from Colorado argues that in the West, people’s attraction to bluegrass lies in the fact that many of them are not native to the region and are longing for a sense of identity rooted in place, history, and tradition they found in their home region. He explained that in his native Kentucky:

Traditions have been established and have been in place for a very long time. But here, this area is so new, evidenced by the fact that there are few old buildings or houses. Consequently people are trying to seek out and find new traditions but in fact they are looking inside of old ones. It’s sort of a Norman Rockwell fascination with a pastoral image of a past that never really existed. A lot of these people who are living in cities who may have roots in the mountains or in the hills or country yearn for an aspect of that lifestyle and idolize it—its some sort of idealization of the past where they imagine the harmonious family sitting together on their front porch. We really don’t have a culture and we really don’t have a regional identity these days, especially those of us living in the suburbs. I think people find some comfort in bluegrass or Appalachian or just some sort of folklore in general.

For Clarence, bluegrass provides a sense of home and place he left behind in his native Kentucky. Although he and other fans may not be able to experience directly the strong sense of place evoked by bluegrass music, by listening to and participating in the culture, individuals can transcend their yearning for place by entering into this mythical universe, even if only momentarily. This statement reflects a sentiment shared by many residents who have left the sprawling urbanization of the Front Range region of the Rocky Mountains to seek refuge in
For fans of bluegrass music in the Rocky Mountain West, the juxtaposition of the rural imagery of bluegrass music and the concomitant urban sprawl and development work in two ways: First, bluegrass music is associated with the mountain landscape and connects well with those living in or near the mountains or foothills. Chris, a 35 year-old mandolin player that bluegrass functions to preserve this landscape, despite the fact that much of it is changing as a result of urban growth:

Bluegrass has this strong connection to the landscape- mountains, creeks, and valleys- and it tries to preserve this. It creates the feeling and imagery of people sitting on their front porch, with the sun going down, surrounded by mountains, I think a lot of people that like it dial into this imagery and feeling.

Second, bluegrass music and culture attempt to preserve an entire way of life that is threatened to be lost to the forces of modernization. Danny, a 32 year-old Native of the Front Range region argues that bluegrass provides a way to create and preserve both a sense of place and tradition for those who are either rootless or fearful that these are in danger of being lost. He state that bluegrass:

...paints a picture of a way of life that we are losing and that’s a rural way of life... I mean a real rural way of life where people live and connected to a place and stay there their entire life. And their work is connected to that place in a meaningful way. This (sense of) place for them isn’t just wanting to vacation there or having a vacation home in the mountains. Bluegrass may be an illustration of people trying to make that connection in other ways but I think society has gone down this path where we have abandoned true rural life, with people living close to the land and connected to their place and their people. That’s what people find important about that rural feeling and imagery in bluegrass (emphasis his).
Though many more casual listeners do not share this particularly acute appreciation of the history and tradition of music, many see bluegrass music as symbolic of simple life and nostalgic for a vague sense of rural values and country living. Participants I spoke with described their attraction to bluegrass music and culture as one rooted in the music’s simplicity. Structurally, bluegrass music follows a relatively simple set of chord progressions, melodies and lyrical arrangements that provide a foundation for most traditional and modern styles. The song structures are usually very simple and repetitive, with many songs having the same or similar musical structure. This simplicity is also symbolic of a perceivably simpler time and place in our nation’s history. Explaining the growth of bluegrass music in the west, Joanne, a 58 year-old resident of Manhattan, Kansas, sees it as one more way in which people are turning away from the cares of their daily lives to embrace a kinder, gentler time in our country’s past. A way in which they are seeking to balance the stress and pressure that they deal with every day.”

Carlton, a guitarist and budding mandolinist who travels to the intermountain west for its host of bluegrass festivals explains “Among the working class people I’ve met in Texas, I think a nostalgia for ‘home,’ some kind of lost innocence and a kind of simplicity is an important draw. The increased popularity of bluegrass is partly attributed to a lot of folks looking for some honesty and simplicity in a hurried and complex world.” While some feel bluegrass music is riding the coattails of recent popular films like O’ Brother Where Art Though, others feel that the rapid growth of the genre is illustrative of a
larger and more profound cultural shift. According to Elton, a 27 year-old Californian, "I think the rising popularity is not just the 'O' Brother phenomenon.' I think it is a general paradigm shift in life philosophies toward more simplicity in one’s lifestyle, consumption, et cetera.” K.T., 52 year-old a registered nurse, explains that the growing numbers of fans flocking to bluegrass are "trying to find some kind of root system in today's crazy world.” or as Mark, a 42 year-old freelance writer from Michigan mentioned, “living in such complicated times, and in high stress, high energy environments, people are looking for something simpler. People are looking for a better sense of roots and home and find this in bluegrass.”

Those who have a working knowledge of the social and history of bluegrass music see their participation as intimately linked to its evolving traditions and enduring narratives of displacement, lost home, and longing for place. Seeing bluegrass music as “particularly well suited for people who are displaced or seeking a sense of family or home that they left behind elsewhere,” Kristen believes that many mobile and transient fans tap into these themes, especially those living away from their families and homes further east or west. She explains, “There are a lot of displaced people in the West—a lot of transplants— I believe the interest in bluegrass out here is about finding a common way to connect with people, because a lot of them are people who left their home for one reason or another” to move to Colorado and other parts of the West.
Compared to these other forms of cultural expressions, participants explain that bluegrass offered narratives more faithful and relevant to their own life experiences. Because it is experienced as a cultural form that speaks the voices of “the folk,” bluegrass music effectively transmits what one respondent identified as a “populist aura” to the music and culture. Respondents identify that bluegrass not only articulates the experiences of those who listen and participate in the culture, but is imbued with “genuine meaning” and “soul.” These characteristics are often experienced in dialectical opposition to other more mainstream musical and cultural alternatives. Karen, a 31 year-old Florida resident who travels to Colorado each summer for its rich array of bluegrass festivals, articulates this point. She hypothesizes “I think bluegrass music gets to the core of the soul. I think it is re-emerging because people want that raw, natural, meaningful music rather than the synthesized bullshit they get from the mainstream media... people want to go back to roots music.” Kent, a filmmaker from Texas, likens this revolt from mainstream cultural forms as synonymous to the cultural revolution witnessed in the 1960s. He argues that this reaction is especially pertinent in the American West and states “I think the same kind of reaction to the world that I saw and experienced in the early 1960’s may be taking place in the West: A reaction against the phony, pre-fab, commerciality of the world that would make one look around for a music and a lifestyle with a bit more honesty and reality built into it.”

Compared to the larger cultural context, respondents indicate that the bluegrass festival allows its fans to experience grass-roots community and share
in intimate communion thus providing an alternative to or vacation or escape from impersonal and commercialized cultural interactions. They explain that their friends and jam partners share similar disdain for corporate driven culture and found bluegrass attractive because, according to Kent, “it actively brings people together and gives them a way to be individuals in a world and culture that is homogenized.” Rocky, another festival attendee from Kansas explained the growth and rise of bluegrass in the New West as an alternative to the rampant materialism in our culture:

I think the main source of growth of bluegrass as a genre in the West is coming from baby boomer types with the time and money to look for new sources of musical entertainment that gives them an emotional, perhaps spiritual anchor in today’s materialistic, unsoulful society.

Kent and Rocky both point out that since meaningful cultural outlets aren’t readily available in their local areas, many participants like themselves will travel, sometimes thousands of miles, to the Rocky Mountain region to seek out these opportunities. Ellie, a graduate student in Colorado finds this mobility as a relative privilege to those can afford it, and states that in the setting “you mostly have white, middle or upper class people traveling to these festivals from California and the East Coast.” She asks ironically, “Who else can take four days of work off, and say ‘I need community, I’m going to go travel and find community,’ and take a break from their life? That’s not going to happen for a lot of people.” Mary, a 33 year-old accountant who drives over 12 hours from her home in Montana to attend a Colorado festival offers a similar explanation, and stated that “in a world of Internet yuppies, pervasive, plastic media and the
complete standardization of the American culture,” the rise of bluegrass in the West “is based on a desire to find something real and something honest,” two cultural resources she and Ellie feel are ever in short supply in modern America.

The responses of these bluegrass fans counter Fiske’s claim that in modern, capitalist societies “there is no so-called authentic folk culture against which to measure the ‘inauthenticity’ of mass culture.” (Fiske in Frith 1996) To be sure, there may be no “real” or “true” folk culture that remains isolated from the throes of commercialization and mass marketing, but the fans of bluegrass music characterize and secure meaning from this music because it is perceived as authentic and as containing elements and expressions of folk culture they perceive missing in other mass cultural forms. Even though the folk, old-time, and bluegrass musical forms to which they are comparing mainstream cultural options were always-already commercial when introduced to audiences through radio, record, and concert performances, they are significantly “purer” and untainted by commercial forces than many mass cultural forms. Illustrating Storey’s argument that distinctions between popular and other forms of culture imply an “absent/present other” with which popular culture is contrasted (Storey 1998 p.18), bluegrass fans juxtaopose their music with other mass mediated and mass marked forms which are perceived by fans as plastic, inauthentic, and sterile compared to the more genuine bluegrass sound. Defined in opposition to other, mass cultural

15 Although many disagree about the folk/popular status of bluegrass music (Fenster, 1995), the musical forms and traditions are rooted in folk performances and are experienced by its listeners and performers as possessing numerous elements of the life and lore of “the folk.” Despite raging debates between scholars of cultural studies concerning the relevance or accuracy of drawing distinctions and binaries between commercial and folk music (sources), these are distinctions that carry weight with the bluegrass fan.
forms, namely commercial country, electric rock and roll, and pop music, bluegrass fans in the New West are drawn to the music as an alternative to cultural forms motivated by market and consumer driven capitalism. It is in this context that fans of the New West consume and perform this brand of perceivably authentic traditional American folk music.

In this chapter, I traced the bluegrass symbol and signifier through the cultural and social history of bluegrass music. Bringing this history to the present day, I explain how the cultural memories of Appalachian history constructed in and through the bluegrass song have been used and appropriated to cope with the problematics of modern living. Loosely organizing the aesthetic of the bluegrass festival site, the nostalgic symbols of bluegrass music aid in creating a site of authentic folk culture in which participants can perform attachments to home, place, and community. In the following chapter, I examine the processual emergence of the bluegrass festival as a distinct set of spaces and places. I argue that festivalgoers use the festival space, especially the campground setting, as a site of place performance.
As established in the previous chapter, the symbolic appeal of bluegrass is inextricably tied to nostalgic images of home, place, and community characterizing the Appalachian cultural landscape. Throughout its rich history, the images of Appalachian life and culture have organized the experiences of listeners and performers by contrasting their lived experience with a perceivably simpler and more authentic time and place in American history. Performed in a New West context, this symbolism takes on particular significance for droves of New Westers who seek out the bluegrass festival as an authentic site of place and identity performance. In this chapter, I describe the processual emergence of the festival camp in bluegrass festival campground settings across the New West. Through the festival experience, participants reconfigure festival spaces by transforming them into meaningful and remembered places. I contend that residents in these mobile, portable communities alter their everyday connections to place by recoding festival space and reclaiming it through the folk and bluegrass music aesthetic.

In the New West, mobile and often geographically dispersed festivalgoers congregate each summer in small, rural, and often historically preserved mountain and country towns like Telluride (Telluride Bluegrass Festival), Westcliffe (High Mountain Hay Fever Festival), Pueblo (Bluegrass on the River Festival), Glenwood Springs (Sunlight Mountain Music Festival), Pagosa Springs (Four Corners Folk Festival), and Lyons, Colorado (Rockygrass Festival), Laramie
(Laramie Peaks Bluegrass Festival) and Grand Targhee, Wyoming (Grand Targhee Bluegrass Festival), and Winfield, Kansas (Walnut Valley Festival). These bluegrass festival spaces coexist with other sites of open-air music performance through a traveling festival culture that emerged in the late 1960s. These settings often work through a set of environmental values “whereby culture and nature harmonize through music.” (Leyshon et. al. 1995, p.424). Local, live, and open-air performances of music, while not necessarily producing an alternative sound, enable people to experience music in distinctive, localized ways (Smith, 1994). In fact, many styles of music and bands have emerged in the context of the Telluride festival (including the “newgrass” sound of Newgrass Revival, Strength in Numbers, String Cheese Incident, Sam Bush Band, Leftover Salmon, Yonder Mountain String Band, Bela Fleck and the Flecktones, Commotion, David Grisman Quintet, and various other combinations) and have been identified and referred to as the “Telluride sound.” For listeners, the surrounding natural landscapes and the acoustic sounds of the bluegrass festival harmonize in ways that construct a local or sense of place. In the context of these existing and enduring places, festivalgoers from the Mountain West and beyond constructed temporary residential campground communities to which they have intimate and meaningful connections. In this chapter, I follow Duffy (2000), in asking “how does a musical coding of space help create a sense of place?” and in what ways does the engagement with the aural symbol of bluegrass create a regional identity through connections to place (Duffy 2000, p. 51)?
Though not intending to replicate or recreate Appalachian communities of old as represented in traditional bluegrass music, participants construct perceivably simpler forms of community life that celebrate traditional values and ways of life in a modern social and cultural context. Revolving around the intentionally cultivated values of simplicity, authenticity, tradition, ritual, and extended family or kin, these festival spaces transport participants to a space and time where life is perceived to be simpler and more meaningful. In the New West bluegrass festival setting, the music is performed away from city life in isolated, rural amphitheaters and music parks. Participants draw from the down home cultural symbolism of bluegrass discussed in the previous chapter and perform these in altogether different settings in their search for intimate attachment to place. The intentional planning and construction of these festival camp spaces suggest that the participants are longing for a sense of place and community imbued with history and tradition, symbolic of family and home, and expressive of regional identity. For the brief time that they emplace and inhabit the host towns and the festival camps, they become temporary residents of “Winfield,” “Telluride,” or “Lyons” in which they identify as an inhabitant of particular campsites, particular camp “neighborhoods,” and particular festival camps.

In the sections that follow, I describe the festival campground setting in detail because it is the stage on which participants perform a sense of place, community, and identity discussed in the following three chapters. As Goffman (1959) explains
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In the sections that follow, I describe the festival campground setting in detail because it is the stage on which participants perform a sense of place, community, and identity discussed in the following three chapters. As Goffman (1959) explains
"A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as a part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it" (p. 22).

The processes through which the festival setting emerges, and the phases through which it progresses, therefore is central in defining the place for festival participants and demarcating particular phases of festival time. With each successive stage, and with each successive marker of festival time, participants engage in a corresponding set of behaviors. And as Goffman points out, these markers of entering and exiting and the physical building up and tearing down of the setting guide actors in their definition of the situation and provide cues as to expected behaviors. Following Milligan (1998) in her study of place attachment in a university coffee house, I contend that the campground setting become the stage for social interactions within the festival space. Here, place attachment describes the meaning making practices and interactional relationships between individuals and the physical site. To be sure, bluegrass festival participants interact with festival spaces in multiple ways, each of which represents a distinct and deeply personal relationship to place. Realizing there is "no simple linking of a bounded and identifiable group of people to a particular place," I describe the bluegrass festival as a set of places with which participants' relationships are "not fixed and unchanging, but multiple and shifting" (Duffy, 2000:52).
Constructing Place in the Festival Camp

Over the course of these weekend or weeklong music festivals, participants build elaborate campsites in open fields adjoining the festival site. Promoters and organizers provide this space to accommodate out-of-town visitors and attendees of the festival who plan to sleep in campers, RVs, tents, or vehicles during its duration. Festivals that have been hosted in the same location for an extended period of time, usually fifteen or more years, attract a relatively consistent group of “core” members who camp in roughly the same areas and with the same group of campers. As each year of the festival passes, the campground gains more and more residents who begin to return year after year after having made new friendships and relationships with their campmates and camp neighbors. Transitory and fleeting, these villages are planned, constructed, emplaced, torn down, planned for, and built again the following year. Though existing for usually no more than a week or two, these settings provide festival goers with a stable, reliable sense of place that they have an active role in constructing and maintaining. Though these emergent campground villages are packaged by festival promoters as an experience to purchase and consume, the flexible and largely self-governing nature of the campground settings allows bluegrass festival participants to recover elements of individual sovereignty that they find lacking in many sites of consumer culture and public life (Hetherington, 2000). In most venues of American culture, “the consumer is content to receive an experience just as it has been presented to him (sic) by theorists and planners.” It
is this loss of consumer and cultural sovereignty that participants seek to reclaim through the building of the festival camp.

Each year, participants build increasingly elaborate campsites and bring more modern conveniences to the festival site. Over time, as participants return year after year to assemble their camps in the same location, the look and feel of these festival campground spaces becomes increasingly consistent and reliable from one year to the next. Growing out of specific camp rituals, memories, or events, camp planners will often construct their camp around a particular creative theme that organizes the selection of campsite décor. Once established and named, these camps become stable markers of festival space and nodes of festival memory as participants’ festival experiences become meaningful in the context of these festival places.

The typical festival camp emerges through seven distinct and predictable phases. Participants move through each of these successively, each of which evokes a particular set of emotions and elicits a specific set of challenges. Participants also interact with these distinct phases as markers of festival time. These markers are significant in that they help to organize the festivalgoers’ experience throughout the duration of the festival and frame appropriate behaviors during each point in the camp’s development.

**Planning**

The first phase of festival place building includes the *planning* of the festival campsite in both the preparatory and architectural sense. Planning,
especially for those festivals that have been hosted for several years and attract a growing number of fans, includes securing festival tickets and the often illusive passes for the prime, on-site camping. For many of these festivals held in the summer months, festival sponsors open ticket sales months before the event. In the case of the Telluride, Rockygrass, and other festivals, ticket sales begin upwards of nine months before the festival date. In the case of the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, the highly sought after Town Park camping passes are distributed in a random lottery due to the large number of people who camp on site year in and year out, and the growing number of people who wish to experience the infamous camping experience for the first time. Ticket seekers send in their payment with the hopes that their envelope will be chosen among the lucky winners. Even though these drawings are held long before the festival, and at times long before the main stage acts have even been announced, these lotteries are extremely competitive and illustrate the draw of these festival camp spaces above and beyond the main stage festival performances themselves. Tickets for these events range from $225 for a 4-day festival pass with on-site camping for festivals attracting nationally known musical acts to smaller festivals drawing local or more regional acts that charge $10 or $20 per day with free on-site camping.

Long before the festival begins, usually days, weeks, months, or even a whole year before their arrival to the festival site, participants create elaborate lists of supplies that they will need throughout the festival as well as other decorations, amenities, and comforts that will make the festival camp “home.”
During this phase, camp residents carefully design and collect materials or supplies for their campsite. Gathering the necessary supply of tents, shelters, tarps, camp chairs, portable stoves, lanterns, sleeping bags, mats, acoustic instruments, blankets, firewood, insect repellent, and rain gear, planners often add to their lists couches, recliners, disco balls, decorative tapestries, parachute shelters, national and state flags, barbecue cookers, propane powered kitchen stoves, picnic tables, dart boards, wind chimes, bubble machines, decorative lights, propane heaters, rolls of carpet, and portable showers. Whereas most newcomers to the festival plan a few days in advance and bring minimal camp supplies, more veteran campers take notes throughout each festival to document those things that would have been handy around the campsite or perhaps saw adorning other campsites. For many, the planning process begins before the previous years’ festival ends as campers take notes about items they had left behind or document ideas for the following years’ campsite theme.

For the more elaborate campsites, especially those organized around a creative theme, planning becomes an elaborate process of architectural design. In these camps, camp creators construct at times large, decorative adornments that they haul with them to the festival site. For example, some have constructed entire facades representing an Old West street front, a rickety barn, or a miniature covered wagon that they set up in front of their camp shelter. Most others sew long colorful cloth banners or construct large decorative plywood placards at the entrance of the camp to announce the name of the camp and perhaps the origin of its members. Themed camps like Midnight Bacon (whose members have a
tradition of cooking bacon at midnight throughout the festival), Flamingo Camp (whose members adorn their camp with a tropical theme of palm trees and pink flamingos of various sizes), Camp Wooden Head (whose members construct an elaborate medieval castle complete with catapult and enormous wooden figured foosball table) and Doozies Domino Lounge (whose members host dart and domino competitions throughout the festival) are planned and constructed by their members months in advance in their home garages and workshops. These themed and creatively named camps become important sites of identification within the festival itself, as members of these camps regard themselves as “residents” of these camps.

Throughout the year, some of the more technologically savvy participants connect with other festivalgoers via Internet chat rooms and computer bulletin boards designed especially for a particular festival. Veteran campers will often share their knowledge of the campsite layout, unique or unexpected circumstances from years past, recommended places to purchase camping gear or campsite supplies, or strategies for battling the unpredictable weather. These veterans often provide invaluable advice to newcomers who are traveling to the site for their first festival or perhaps supply novel ideas for those who have been coming for a few years. Since many festival participants are geographically dispersed, these electronic forums allow individuals to communicate their arrival time, their expected camp location, best routes to travel to and from the festival, and perhaps specific supplies they will be bringing and sharing (like propane heaters, kegs of home brewed beer, or large barbecue cookers) with the rest of the group. Since
many members of these camp communities remain geographically separated throughout the year, they use the forums to collectively recreate "virtual" festival spaces and to plan and prepare for the contingencies that the upcoming festival will bring. Discussion list members also use these forums the days and weeks leading up to the festival to organize pre-festival events and schedule the times and meeting places for campsite traditions. Often identified by special "list member" badges or buttons, members of these chat-groups meet in specified locations to reconnect with longtime friends or to put online nicknames with unfamiliar faces.

As the last days before the festival approach, participants shore up their belongings, pack up their vehicles, and eagerly await the moment they will be on their way. Usually this process is awaited with much anticipation as attendees count down the weeks and days before their departure. In fact, some festival websites have a running counter displaying the days remaining before the start of the festival and at certain times, festival discussion list participants will send reminders that there are perhaps 100, 50, or 25 days remaining until their departure. Festivalgoers usually indicate that they have a difficult time focusing at work, because all of the time and attention is channeled into their festival planning. Often, via e-mail or phone communication, friends or family who have arrived earlier in the week will send status reports back to those still finishing up their last days of work before their long awaited vacation. These status reports often include updates about the weather, traffic or road conditions, or perhaps changes in the procedures for campground set-up or festival rules.
Pilgrimage

Once travelers have collected their items and have packed the car, they are ready to make the pilgrimage to the festival site, the second phase in festival time. Because many festivals take place in isolated, rural amphitheaters and music parks and require that participants travel hundreds or even thousands of miles, the pilgrimage to the festival site becomes a significant event in itself. Taking place at regularly scheduled times or during particular points of the year, and marking the passing of seasons, or celestial happenings, pilgrimage and festival frequently become recurrent rituals. At the Walnut Valley Festival, one of the official trademarks of the festival, which adorns t-shirts, bumper stickers, and the festival’s periodic newsletter, the Occasional, is the slogan: “I Can’t. I’m going to Winfield!” For Rene, a 32 year-old yoga instructor from Oklahoma, this particular festival, which takes place each year over the third weekend in September, “is something that I always clear my calendar for.” In fact, when leaving this festival on the final day, volunteers pass out bumper stickers that announce the date for the following years festival to ensure that participants return and “save the date” for the following year.

For Anthropologists, pilgrimage has been described as “a rite of passage that involves the temporary removal of a person from their host society to a sacred space at a special site” (Hetherington 2000, p. 75). Historically, pilgrimage referred to a dedicated journey to a sacred site of religious or spiritual life. In the contemporary period, tourists in the modern world make treks to shrines and sites
of a secular world (MacCannell 1976; Neumann 1993). In many religious traditions, the process of pilgrimage involves self-removal from everyday life into a transcendent, liminal world that is believed to provide a source of spiritual cleansing and renewal and demonstrate the religious dedication of the pilgrim. An "important social process centering around healing, renewal, and individual harmony with community," the pilgrimage to the festival site became symbolic of a liminal "passage in and out of everyday life" (Neumann 1993, 214-215; Turner, 1974). Hetherington mentions that through this separation "the ordeals of pilgrimage en route" and the ceremonies that take place once the pilgrims have arrived... a person comes to be initiated into a new state of being and a new sense of faith... having experienced the communitas of the pilgrimage en route, their identity symbolically undergoes a process of renewal in some kind of festival celebration" (Hetherington 2000, p. 75). Like traditional notions of pilgrimage, the sites to which bluegrass festivalgoers travel are often on the margins or peripheries of inhabited areas (Hetherington 2000), usually in small mountain towns at rural amphitheaters and music parks. Victor Turner points out that the "peripherality of pilgrimage" and its temporal structure are symbolically important in that travelers start in a "Familiar Place," go to a "Far Place" and return, "ideally 'changed,'" to a "Familiar Place" (Turner 1973, p. 211).

During the initial stages of their festival pilgrimage, the travelers slowly leave behind their familiar workday worlds of schedules, deadlines, and responsibilities as they begin to venture further away from home. Described by Clifford, a web designer from suburban Denver as "this strange phenomenon
where you travel away from home—you leave society, and have this epiphany—then return somehow changed.” the pilgrimage to the festival becomes a symbolic break from daily life. This break also signaled a break “in and out of time” (Turner 1973, p. 211) a chronotope (Bahktin 1981) that ruptured and reoriented the familiar space-time dimensions of travelers’ daily lives. Like Mark Neumann’s (1993) alternative bus tour travelers who operated on “Tortoise Time,” festival participants described the pilgrimage as a transition whereby they left “real world time” and entered a space organized by “festival time.” Karen, a thirty-year-old counselor, also from suburban Denver explains that she “feel[s] very present and very in the moment” while road tripping through the rural, mountainous countryside to the festival grounds. Soaking in the scenery, Karen states that she is “not thinking about anything but that moment- I’m not thinking about five minutes from now or five minutes ago. I have no sense of anything else except maybe the scenery. I’m not thinking of any cares I have at home related to my job. Anything like that that pops into my head and floats right away.”

Much like Hetherington’s (2001) New Age Travelers, the idea of countryside is extremely important to fans of bluegrass music as a symbolic geography that provides a focus for their lifestyles and identity. Featuring small rural mining towns, isolated roads and mountain passes, and often breathtakingly beautiful landscapes, these spaces and places signify a backcountry wilderness removed from markers of mass society and culture. The final destination places, the small town locations of the bluegrass festival, fit squarely within these open and largely undeveloped country landscapes symbolically link to their rustic and
rural pasts. For festivalgoers like Karen and Clifford, the open road carried them “away from the routines of everyday life and toward a space and time of new encounters, possibilities, and playful improvisation,” pulling them “away from conventions and stability of everyday life” into “new forms of social organization” (Neumann 1993, p.209).

Abandoning a regimented schedule for one that emphasizes flexibility and spontaneity, many festivalgoers make a multiple day road trip and stop at other cultural, geographical, or geological sites along the way. Groups of vehicles carrying friends and families will caravan to the festival as well, which adds to the festival pilgrimage as a shared social event. As the caravan makes stops together for food or rest stops and communicates throughout the trip with walkie-talkies or cellular phones, members of the caravan begin to form bonds with each other outside of the context of their everyday lives. Ellie, a twenty four-year-old graduate student explained that she caravanned in two vehicles with about seven or eight people. The spontaneity of their trip and the adventures that it produces allowed her to see different sides of her longtime friends and form new relationships with those she did not know before the start of her trip.

When we got on the road, we were excited to be leaving town and all of our stress behind. We got on the road and before we know it, we were driving through the mountains, singing songs. The best part of the trip was getting off the interstate so we could see some sights and places off the beaten path. We even got a flat tire, which wasn’t all that bad because there was a whole group of us hanging around and goofing off while two of our friends changed the tire.

As friends and family members make the pilgrimage to the festival site, the time spent on the road, especially when filled with unexpected sights, sounds, events,
or adventures, provides moments for the spontaneous building of a distinctive
group identity and solidarity (Neumann, 1993) and a sense of fellowship in
adversity (Hetherington, 2000). Travelers often carry these feelings into the
festival experience itself as they venture from the road into the festival site.
Exhausted and weary from hours on the road, Ellie explained that the adventure-
filled trip to the festival set the tone for their arrival at the festival grounds. “We
pulled into town at about one o’clock in the morning, and pulled up to our
campsite and right away there were people there welcoming us- and it’s one
o’clock in the morning!” Like Ellie and her group, upon arrival, travelers meet up
with other friends, family, or fellow festivalgoers who are waiting in line to enter
the festival site or who have endured the land rush and have already begun to set
up camp.

**Land Rush and Set Up**

Before the start of the festival, campers line up for hours, days, and in
some cases weeks before festival staff open the gates to the campsites. Though
some may ponder why someone in their right mind would show up days and even
weeks before the gates open, others see this as a yearly ritual where they can relax
and meet causally with old friends before the thousands of festival attendees
arrive. More pragmatically, however, many arrive to get a good place in line for
the “land rush” during which they will drive or perhaps sprint into the campsite
and lay claim to the territory they will inhabit during the week or weekend of the
festival. Probably the most chaotic moment of the festival, campers scramble
across the land, strategically placing their tents, tarps, and vehicles to maximize the amount of space they will have for the weekend. Before the tents and canopies are actually assembled, campers will stretch their tents and tarps our across the ground to approximate the general floor plan of the campsite to ensure they have allowed adequate space for all of the tents, shelters, and vehicles and to ensure that their site is constructed in a way that will maximize common space between and among the adjoining camps.

Though most people agree this is a fair and respectable way to distribute campground space, others have noticed in recent years that some land hungry campers have been creating boundaries with police “crime scene” tape and blocking off large tracts of land to prevent others from encroaching on their “property.” Jillian, a 35-year-old educator, describes this phenomenon as a “hangover from their daily lives where people want to maximize their space and create boundaries between their neighbors with big fences. They temporarily forget that we are in a place where none of this stuff matters.” Jeremy, a 32-year-old computer programmer from Portland, Oregon concurs, “if you were to concern yourself about boundaries, you could easily have a bad time at the festival.”

Although the distribution of space is officially “first-come, first-served,” certain spaces are recognized by veteran festivalgoers as “off limits” or “reserved” for their rightful owners who camp there from year to year. At times, this causes confusion and potential conflict, as relative newcomers come upon a prime space only to find that the same camp has inhabited it for the past twenty-
five years and that they will be arriving to claim their space shortly. More veteran campers tell most newcomers informally that the space is “reserved,” “already taken,” or “saved” for a particular group and explain that the rightful inhabitants have laid claim to the spot through their veteran status. Out of respect for campsite traditions and more veteran campers, most land rush participants adhere to the informal norms of respect and stake claims in an adjacent spot. Though creating a temporary hassle, others like Timothy, a 50-year-old systems administrator from Denver, prefer the variety of camping in new places, even if it means encroaching on another group’s regular space.

We have not in seven years camped in the same spot. Since we never camp in the same spot, we are always squatters, stealing somebody’s regular spot. We usually don’t decide where we will camp until land rush. We make lots of new friends because every year we have new neighbors. The people who we steal the spot from are usually mad for a little while but we are always good friends the next year.

After the first wave of the land rush, campsite participants filter into the campsites in the days leading up to the actual start of the festival. Latecomers fill in the spaces in the last remaining parcels of open land. These least desirable portions of the campground are usually in the open sun, within earshot (and perhaps downwind) of the endlessly swinging doors of the portable toilets, or in heavy traffic areas in between the already established camps. Because these campground areas are limited in size and are marked off by the physical boundaries of the festival site, tents, canopies, and vehicles appear to be lying literally on top of each other. As Jennie, a resident of Kansas observed, “The campsites are usually all jumbled together. It is quite often difficult to tell where one ends and the next begins.” Because of the close proximity of different campsites, there is often a
free flow of people walking through each other’s space. This close proximity often creates its own challenges as Melinda, a 35-year-old bartender, points out. “One thing is for sure, there's a whole bunch of folks that camp really close together, so you have to be really good at navigation through tents, stakes, wires, hoses, campfires, ruts, coolers, etc. Especially at night. A flashlight is a must.”

Though during the first few days of the land rush, each campsite tends to have ample space between themselves and adjoining camps, Jack, a 42-year-old machinist from Missouri, mentions that “by festival's end you're camped inches away from the next camper or tent or campsite” due to the steady influx of festival goers leading up to and through the festival itself. Described as “perfectly crowded and serenely noisy,” Stan, a funeral director from Oklahoma, pointed out that the campsite straddled a delicate balance of both closer and louder than normal interaction. Despite the potential for uncomfortably close and unusually noisy accommodations, participants like Stan often framed these characteristics as desirable elements of the festival camp setting.

Though some are initially protective of their camp properties in the early stages of the festival, these boundaries usually collapse out of sheer necessity. Whereas the more protective see the boundary crossing as a necessary evil, others view it as an opportunity to stumble into new friendships or musical opportunities. The permeable boundaries between campsites also allow for members of the neighboring campsites to mix and mingle in new and different ways. Gretchen, a 46-year-old office secretary from Indiana, mentions that the
close proximity of neighboring camps brings old and new faces together for the
duration of the festival.

The fact that you camp, party, cook, eat, go to bed, and wake up, with the
same people for a full week you form stronger friendships with your
existing friends and form new ones with those newcomers that plop down
in your campsite because there's no other room to drop a tent. As a result,
the circle of friends you leave with grows with each festival. I've now got
many friends from many states in the U.S. that I wouldn't have, had I not
been attending the festival.

Even before the official start of the festival, participants find that the unofficial
start marked by the scramble of the land rush becomes a significant event in itself.

During this phase of the camp's development, participants meet outside of the
festival gates with longtime friends and festival family, and frantically negotiate
festival space to ensure each camp can build an ample and comfortable home
place. Though problems and conflicts certainly arise, campers indicate that the
close proximity of the festival camps promotes a sense of intimacy for which
festivalgoers long.

After the land rush, portable tent communities spring up and spread out
across the patches of grass lying between the service access roads leading through
the campground. Once their space is secured, camp members begin to quickly
assemble their tents, portable shelters, and picnic tables that will serve as "home"
for the duration of the festival. Emerging from the mass of tangled aluminum
poles, piles of plastic tent stakes, and rows of carefully spaced plastic and canvas
tarps, individuals carefully assemble each piece to ensure that their shelters will
weather potential gusts of wind or storms that may converge on the campground.
Others who prefer more permanent and reliable forms of shelter begin popping
their tops to their VW camper vans or trailers or stretch the awnings of their pull behind RVs and motor homes to create a “front porch” area for common socializing. Gradually, once the shelters have been assembled and fortified, participants begin to decorate and adorn the campsite with both functional and decorative amenities. On a functional level, campers construct rows of tables for their often-elaborate kitchen set-ups, remove folding chairs from their protective travel bags, and haul from the back of their vans and trailers large reclining chairs and couches to provide cozy seating under the canopies. On a more decorative level, campers string rows of “camper lights” across their awnings and shelters, hang windsocks and decorative flags representing the state or country of origin of camp members, adorn the sides of shelters with large, colorful tapestries, and stretch banners or signs announcing the camp name and perhaps the city of origin of the camp’s members.

In an effort to protect themselves from Mother Nature, individuals design their camps in ways that provide maximum comfort for their week or weekend stay. As novices gather camp building tips from experienced campers and as they garner more of their own experience fighting the elements, these lessons are reflected in the site design. As Lora, a social worker from Kansas City, jests,

Perhaps my favorite "ritual" is watching the father of our campsite, Chuck, use his skills at being our "Tarp King" Each year, the tarping of our camp becomes more elaborate, more sophisticated, more hysterical and more threatened by the wind, rain and elements.

By watching others experience struggle with their own camps, Lawman, a 44-year-old data entry specialist from Wichita, mentions “You can learn something new every year about construction with tarps, duck tape and wire. Noting the
modest construction and design, he adds, “I just love to see how they make their spaces home.” Modeling his campsite on the ingenuity that he witnessed from years of festival attendance, Lawman describes a particularly elaborate set up that he constructed.

One year I brought a big farm truck and did a covered wagon sort of thing, with long tarps stretched out on either side. On one side I set up my kitchen which I thought was modest but people would stop as they passed by and wondered at the setup I had created. It just so happened that it was a "rain year" and the space I had created on either side of the truck was swallowed up by friends that filtered in as the days went on. I had a mattress in the back of the truck, which was my bedroom. It was great, I called it “The Penthouse” because I slept above all the commotion that was going on around me.

Because festivals take place in natural environments, camps are often fortified to battle the elements. Lawman mentioned how his elaborate set up was created to shelter him, and his newly found friends, from the weather and chaos of the increasingly muddy festival grounds. Constructed modestly with “wires and duct tape,” camp residents make the most with the supplies they were able to pack into the back of their vans or trucks. Melinda proudly compares her modest yet comparatively elaborate set-up with those camping in the mobile home portions of the festival.

There are the RV dwellers who are so damn swanky with their AC and air-conditioning and microwaves. And then there's me: A van with four-inch foam mat to sleep on. A tent to store gear and use as a dressing room. A little shower cabana so I don't totally gross myself out. A canopy over the front of the van, with my living room, kitchen, and picking parlor all included underneath.

For those like Melinda who design and build their festival camp, form often meets function. During my first few visits to the festival, these camps appeared to represent amazing feats of architectural creativity. Strange yet
strategic configurations of wiring, duct tape, plastic tarps, tents, and vehicles, 
these camps revolved around the types of activities that took place within their 
boundaries. Whereas some camps were rather spartan and consisted of a simple 
grouping of tents with few amenities, or as described above by Lawman and 
Melinda as particularly utilitarian, others were complete monstrosities that 
featured the main sites of campground activity. These larger camps were often 
crafted to accommodate large groups of people who congregated there to 
participate in or simply watch a bluegrass jam or share in communal meals.

When setting up camp, individuals in these larger camps frequently orient 
the tightly packed campsites in ways that maximize space for common socializing. Campers often set up their tents, pop-up and pull behind trailers and RVs into large circles. Commonly, adjoining campers pull a large picnic table or two into the center of the tent and RV circles to create a focal point for the participating campsites. To draw outsiders into their site, generous camp hosts often prepare large kettles of stew, skillets of pancakes or scrambled eggs, racks of roasted chicken or pork barbeque, or kegs of their hand crafted, home-brewed beer that they share with visitors or passersby. Often-elaborately decorated and themed campsites draw many strangers, some who come, instrument in hand, to join in a jam session or just curious about the history of the camp or the origin for their particular theme. Ultimately, these camp spaces become the sites where large groups of people congregate throughout the festival. Barbara likens the formal organization of the camps to more primitive tribal life and states “the campsites remind me of tribal gatherings. Each clan with its group gathered
together in a central area.” Like the pioneers making their way to the West of old, this “circling of the wagons” provides a sense of protection, distinction, and communal interaction among the camps’ members. It distinguishes each particular camp from adjoining camps and differentiates the activities that take place within the camp boundaries. Though camps appear to take on an air of private space because of their enclosed, encircled organization, camp hosts frequently build walkways or gateways inviting outsiders into the camp space to join in camp feasts or jamming activities.

At Doozies Domino Lounge, campers construct three-foot-high decorative dominos that line the walkway into the camp space. As I was walking past their camp, I could not avoid the impulse to walk down the entranceway to meet the camp hosts and to participate in a game of dominos, darts, or sample some of the pork barbeque that they had been preparing throughout the day. Along the main road into Rollin R’ Farm, the camp hosts invited relative strangers to “roll into their farm” through a real life replica of a covered wagon that sheltered a wooden planked walkway into their camp. Beyond the walkway laid an elaborate and authentic-looking barn door façade, which neatly concealed the front of their pop-up nylon shelter. Within the camp laid a comfortable set-up complete with lay-z-boy reclining chairs and soft, cushy couches. Beside the covered wagon, the camp hosts constructed a working water fountain that drew water from a small makeshift pond created from a shallowly dug trench, a piece of visquine to seal the bottom, and a water hose to fill the pond as the water evaporated. Given the camp’s close proximity to the main thoroughfare leading from the campsite into
the main stage festival area, it became an attraction of sorts, as children of all ages walked through the covered walkway back and forth along its wooden planks. In a third example at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, along one of the only thoroughfares through the campsite, members of the Crossroads of Steamboat camp constructed their entire camp over the camp walkway. Anyone traveling from one side of the campground to the other had little choice but to walk directly through their camp. According to one of the people camping at this site, they designed their camp structure to compel passers by to walk into their camp and meet them. “It's just the best way to get to know everyone at the festival. I really cannot think of a better way to accomplish this.”

As the festival progresses and nighttime falls, these communal areas become central nodes for socializing and musical activity. Susan, a 39-year-old research scientist from Texas, describes how these nodes allow her entrée into the camps. She mentions, “I like the little clusters of campers and tents surrounding a central jamming area. I love just wandering up and down the roads and dropping in on people.” Marco, a 31-year-old programmer, concurs and adds that the design of each camp strives to achieve a particular goal.

The campsites are warm and friendly, especially if there's a fire going. Each campsite has its own ambiance, its own way of layout that promotes a particular set of activities. Maybe the camp is a music setting with a centralized circle of chairs for jamming; maybe it's a cooking setting with an elaborate kitchen for common meals.

Though many sites are organized and decorated in ways to create common socializing areas and to bring passers-by into the camp, others are organized in ways that are more pragmatic as Marco points out. Occasionally, camp hosts
would erect large canopies or secure enormous parachutes above the camp space by securing it to branches hanging between the trees. These parachutes, which could be seen from across the campground, provided a practical shelter from the rain, sun, and elements but also a symbolic marker that this is a place where large groups tend to congregate. It is in the context of these larger, publicly recognized festival camps that participants constructed and performed a meaningful sense of place.

**Constructing and Performing Place**

In a matter of days or even a few hours, these camp spaces are reconfigured from open, vacant fields into vibrant, free form tent communities. As participants interact in these festival spaces, they begin to attach significant meaning to the people and the physical layout of the campsite. Over time, they begin to see these camps as a distinct set of places despite flowing boundaries. Simply put, “what begins an undifferentiated space becomes place when we endow it with values” (Tuan, 1977). Though provided for campers by the festival organizers, these campgrounds are neither formally planned by developers nor organized by the mandates of an official bureaucracy. Jenny, a 28 year-old schoolteacher from Missouri, describes the campsite setting as “a place of complete unbridled creative expression. The possibilities are limitless and there are no rules.” Because there are few if any formal rules, restrictions, planning codes, or land use restrictions for these festival camps, their emergence provides an interesting glimpse into the formal arrangement of camp structures and the
distribution of space within the campground. Campers are free to build and arrange their campsites in any fashion that they please (barring local laws or formal festival rules prohibiting campfires or other potentially dangerous structures). As a form of vernacular expression, like other folk or vernacular architectures that are the “product of a place, of a people, by a people” (Kingston 1988, p.5), the camp forms that emerge reflect participants’ shared values and desires for intimate, communal interaction.

Over a period of years, long-time attendees find particular spots in the campground that they return to year after year. Especially at the longer-running festivals, the continuity of the festival camp as a place and the continuity in the placement of the camps from year in to year out provides participants with a stable sense of place to which they can return. According to Audrey, a 37-year-old accountant, the continuous and reliable nature of the regular placement themed campsites “builds up a sense of community among the campers; a shared history, a shared sense of place, and shared set of traditions. People love ritual, and the continuity of the rituals over the years helps hold us together.” Because the sights, the sounds, the people, and the physical geography of the festival site remains relatively consistent even with an influx of newcomers, Vinnie, a long time attendee of the Walnut Valley Festival explains:

Because many of the camps are set up in the same spots year after year, it’s almost like a tent city that exists continuously. Of course, I generally come the weekend before the festival, and see much of the campground fill up over the course of the week, so the annual construction is evident to me. But to someone who only comes on the actual weekend of the festival every year, it must seem as though the Pecan Grove campground always looks as it does that weekend each fall.
Participants also retain continuity of place from year to year at the larger, longer running festivals such as Telluride, the Walnut Valley Festival, and the Strawberry Festival outside Yosemite, California, by generating a creative name to thematically distinguish their particular campsite. These often silly monikers organize the décor and the events that take place within camp space. Camps names like Midnight Bacon, The River Rats, Comfortable Shoes, Big Britches, Glitter Gultch, Malfunction Junction, and Flamingo Camp adorn large banners strung prominently across the front of the camp. Each camps is recognized by festivalgoers not only by name and décor but by the events, traditions, and characters associated with each. For example, Midnight Bacon has a nightly tradition whereby camp hosts cook up a massive spread of bacon as the clock rounds midnight. As such, it becomes a popular congregating spot for large groups of people who are seeking to get their bacon fix before the morning breakfast. Deena, a 42- year-old data entry specialist, explains that the main reason people organize their camps around creative themes for their camps is “just to have a little fun and express an identity that is a bit different than the other camps.” Additionally, she states that these themes often grow from a “particularly memorable event or incident” that the camp members encountered. Describing the origin of two prominent camps at the Winfield festival, Deena states:

One camp, the Flood Victims, was so named because, due to the heavy rain, their campsite got flooded out one year. The Chickentrain Camp was another that was named because that was the name of one of the first songs we played at the campsite that year. We started with that one simply because it was easy. It only has one chord, E. For some reason it just stuck. We decided that would be a good theme and went crazy with chickens the next year.
As a marker of festival memory and container of festival experiences, participants interact with themed camps like Chicken Train as distinct places and sites of memorable campsite traditions and rituals. Sociologist Melinda Milligan (1998) contends a particular place’s “interactional past,” which describes one’s past experiences, memories, and emotions with this place, comprises a major component of place attachment (p.2). The shared interactional past of the festival site is often carried along from year to year through shared stories, memories, e-mail and chat room discussions, and festival planning. It serves, therefore as a way for festivalgoers to create a continuous and reliable sense of place, even though the site itself disbands after a week’s time. In fact, even participants who have been away from the festival for a period of years recognize the continuity in form of the campsites. Audrey, who hadn’t been to the festival in years explains “I don't know how I let fifteen years go by without attending but upon returning I was amazed at how much had not changed, especially the spirit.” Combined with a place’s “interactional potential,” or the future experiences imagined or anticipated to be possible in a site,” individuals begin to develop a sense of place, “a physical site given meaning through interaction” (Milligan 1998, p.2). As festivalgoers interact more intimately with the physical geography of the campsites, accordingly they begin to see the campground space unfold as a distinct set of places.

While some places are constructed around festival memories or traditions, other camps take on altogether different themes by creating a space for fantasy
and play. Tom, a mountain dulcimer player from Colorado describes one of the creative themes he and the rest of the River Rat camp generated:

The other most fun my campmates and I have with music is Octoberfest. So we set up an Octoberfest at Winfield. We have a big canopy that we hang lights and lots of flowers suspended from hula hoops that we attach to the ceiling. We hang Bavarian flags and try to make it look like a German beer garden tent. We have a flag with a picture of King Ludwig II that is our trademark. We sometimes have an alpenhorn—think Ricola TV commercial—and a resident accordion player. We sing German drinking songs mixed with bluegrass jams. Our official beer is King Ludwig Beer imported from Bavaria.

By creating both a space of fantasy and a place in which some of their camp members could represent their German heritage, they created a new sense of place while paying respect to their places of origin or perhaps places of national heritage. Other markers within the festival camp also identify particular camp participants as being from a particular place. Often the banners that announce the name of the camp also identifies them as being part of a particular city or town, state, or perhaps even country. For example, members of the Stillwater Camp fly a huge banner above their camp announcing that their camp consists of members who traveled to the festival from Stillwater, Oklahoma, The “International Camp” also expresses the origins and ethnic identities of its diverse participants through the prominent display of national flags.

Though many camps like Exit 81 proudly represent a group of campers originating from an area approximating the same highway exit, others represent a more critical relationship to place of origin. Steve, the camp host explained that he decided to build and name his camp Country Flub Plaza because he wanted to figure out a way to tell everyone that he was from Kansas City. He explained to
me that Country Club Plaza is the name of Kansas City’s historic downtown shopping district. He came up with the idea to re-create the square by constructing a mock bell tower, a working fountain complete with horse “statues,” and by naming each of his camps’ tents after a playful and mocking spoof on the various businesses lining the square. With names like “Barns and Yodels, Sox Fifth Avenue, and Potty Barn (mocking the national chain stores of Barnes and Nobles, Sachs Fifth Avenue, and Pottery Barn), he explained that the wanted to poke fun at the “rampant commercialism of the square.” Though Steve explains that he loves living in Kansas City, there were certainly elements of the city that he finds to be lacking in authenticity and character.

**Mapping Place**

At Wilkesboro, North Carolina’s Merle Watson Memorial Bluegrass Festival (or Merlefest as it is commonly known) one campsite hosted by the Wilkes County Fire Department is the site of a water treatment plant. For fifty-one weeks out of the year, the grassy area directly in front of and directly to the side of the water holding tanks is what Marc Auge (1995) refers to as a “non-place.” Contrasted with historically significant and socially or politically active places, non-places are the spaces between places that are often passed over and largely ignored from day to day such as parking lots, strip malls, airports, bus terminals, and motorways. As a largely non-functional space outside of the context of the festival, the grassy area surrounding the water treatment plant holds little but aesthetic value and in Tuan’s terms is defined more in terms of space
than by place. During the week of the festival, however, this particular grassy area and similar open fields at other festivals emerge into a vibrant campground and site of numerous informal amateur jam sessions. Service roads that are part of the daily architecture and landscape of the facility become “emplaced” over time by the festivalgoers as they have affectionately named and mapped the natural and physical geography of the campground.

These markers of place also serve a functional purpose in the festival camp by providing a sense of direction and spatial orientation. Jillian points out that the named campsites provide a sense of navigation in a potentially chaotic setting: “It's like a mini Rand McNally develops as everybody gets their campsite set up.” Jessica, a 31-year-old teacher from Colorado, adds:

With so many campers, how do you tell your friends all the way across the grove where you're camped? "Oh yeah, you're down there across the road from the River Rats." "Yeah, just look for the 'Camp Bummer' sign next to the road." "Oh, you're camped next to Comfortable Shoes aren't you?" "Hey, have you been down to the Split Lip camp yet?" And then there's always: "Where's Mary? Oh, she's over in the Pecan Grove at the Carp Camp." It's like it identifies neighborhoods, and it's very necessary when you've got a mash of people gathered in a small area.

Many, like Jessica, pointed out that these markers of place were essential in a setting where everyone, regardless of their seniority at the festival, are always relative newcomers to the physical setting. The thematic names provide a source of distinction between the closely arranged camps and are as Rene explains “a great way to get to know your way around in an instant village such as Winfield. When someone asks how to get to Stillwater camp, you just say "go past Chickentrain camp, past the Comfortable Shoes camp, past My Grass is Blue camp and it'll be on your left.”
Aiding in these place identifiers, festivals like Walnut Valley, Telluride, Rockygrass, and others assign a name to each of the campground areas that correspond in some way to their physical geography. This naming of the open campsite space transforms it into a site of emplacement. For example, the Pecan grove is named as such because it lies in the valley of a grove of pecan trees, whereas Meadow Park and Town Park in Lyons and Telluride Colorado refer to existing municipal parks servicing each town. Other campsites like Sheep Corral, Illium, and Rivers’ Edge provide each camp area with a distinct identity. Respondents indicated accordingly that each of these distinct campground places elicit distinct types of interactions. Whereas Town Park and Pecan Grove tend to attract a more lively partying crowd, Walnut Grove and Meadow Park are known to be somewhat more subdued and family friendly. Craig a 33-year-old truck driver, describes the distinct camping areas at Walnut Valley Festival in terms of existing places:

At Winfield, there are three major camping areas. To me they are like three different cities. The Pecan Grove where I camp is kind of like a small town in the southeastern U.S. Kind of rustic and has lower priced dwellings. Then there is the soccer field, which is more like the central plains area of the U.S. Not much shade, but a good view of everything and slightly better dwellings, you know more campers and motor homes. Then there is the Walnut Grove, a.k.a. Hollywood. This is more like the West Coast: higher priced dwellings, mostly motor homes.

Wherein the tent camping areas’ physical boundaries meld into each other, the motor home and trailer camping areas have more clearly delineated boundaries separating the different camps. Because most motor homes and campers have attached pull out canopies and awnings, the spaces between and among the mobile home camps are slightly less flexible and negotiable.
Additionally, because of the permanent and physically bound nature of the camper shell, residents populating these areas often retreat to their campers at night, creating a boundary between public and private space that is less observable in the tent communities. Susan takes issue with the very different camp setting that emerges in the areas designated for mobile home camping and notices how the physical architecture of the camps limits the level of interaction:

I don't like the people that ‘circle the wagons’ an have these giant RV's walling their common area off to the world. What's the fun in that? It’s very un-neighborly. I make a point of cutting through those just to piss them off and shake things up a bit.

Festival attendees like Susan and Craig mentioned that they felt a closer sense of intimacy during festivals where motor homes, travel trailers, or hotels were not the dominant form of shelter. Because people using more permanent forms of shelter often retreated from surrounding camps by “closing doors behind them,” those using tents indicate that the open air tent camping brought them “closer to nature” and encouraged a closer social and interactional bond with other festival participants because the tent communities lacked the rigid physical boundaries created by mobile homes.

Even though some perceive the mobile home campsites somewhat limiting in terms of creating a sense of open community compared to the tent sites, the forms that emerge tend to be communally organized to accommodate large, interactive groupings of people.

Though many criticize the RV dwellers for their extravagant and comforting environments, other tent campers are a bit more self-reflective and point out the irony that most associate camping with “roughing it” and getting
away from "it all" Yet as Margo, a 33-year-old television media specialist from Manhattan, points out, they usually bring much of "it" with them. Explaining this irony, Margo jests, "I think it's funny that people think they are "camping" just because they are in tents. Maybe it was just our campsite, but it was bigger, nicer and had more amenities than most of my apartments in New York." Though many agree when camping at the festival, they are far from roughing it, campers like Maggie, a 33-year-old sporting goods account manager from Dallas, states that "the campsite setting and going all out is part of what makes Winfield fun. People bring furniture and large appliances to have the most comfortable time possible."

By trucking in accoutrements of all sorts including elaborate kitchens, bar-b-cue's, sofas, recliners, refrigerated beer dispensers, hammocks, mattresses, portable heaters, impromptu shower stalls, rolls of carpet, picnic tables, rugs, and tapestries festivalgoers make their campsites home.

Over time, especially as they return to the same festival year after year, camp with the same groups of people, and dwell next to the same neighbors, participants begin interacting with the festival space as if it were home. My personal favorite tradition is to set up my part of the camp as quickly as I can, turn to my camp mates and loudly declare, "I'm home!" Though many may see "home" as a metaphor for their yearly place of escape, especially given the level of camp comfort they aim to achieve, others take the label seriously imbuing it with rituals that pay homage to home. In fact, multiple festivalgoers have proposed and even had marriage ceremonies at the festival. Joseph, a top-hatted pastor who is a regular at the Walnut Valley festival explains that he performs "at
least one or two (wedding ceremonies) at the festival every year.” Numerous others have written songs and poems about the festivals and festival places. In fact, one campsite features a prominent display of haiku poetry written by festival attendees. Passersby can stop to read the large selection of contributions or perhaps submit their own.

Additionally, over time the well-established and longer running festivals begin to take on characteristics of “real” cities and towns. Through the introduction of monthly “newspapers” and e-mail updates, lively e-mail town meetings that discuss changes to the festival site and new policies and rules that could impact how participants gather and organize their camp spaces. Others have instituted radio stations to provide festival schedule updates, announce events and community happenings, and pump music through the campgrounds to those staying in the camps while the main stage performances are taking place. Town like festival traditions and institutions including the Carp Camp sponsored “homecoming” parade, the yearly “homecoming” gospel sing, the Free Box Fashion Show, and a local downtown “commercial district” complete with a food court, local crafts, clothing shops, and instrument dealers emulate many of the things that are associated with small towns and home spaces.

Interestingly, when I asked them about the notion of the festival camp as being “home” festivalgoers often began to contrast their “festival home” with that of their “real life homes.” Lora states that she is fortunate that her home community is a close one but contends “Winfield, well, it's just my favorite home.” She explains that she loves “being able to walk into someone's camp,
introduce myself and sit down with a beer and get to know them. I've never been anywhere else in my life that compares to the comfort I feel at being "home" in Winfield." Unlike many of their home communities, festival attendees find the festival to reduce the strict boundaries that divide them from others in their daily lives. According to Jay a 52-year-old design engineer from North Carolina, "this type of festival is the only place I know where you can just walk into someone's living room and say howdy." Whereas walls, paved roads, fences, and private property boundaries in everyday life limit the amount and intensity of the interactions that take place, the intimate and communal forms that individuals cultivate in the setting provide a stark contrast. For Lawman, the festival camp bears little resemblance to his home of Wichita and allows him to interact with his festival neighbors in ways that are not as possible at home.

Of course the festival is nothing at all like where I live. Cold pavement, no yards, no music. I don't really talk to my neighbors much except in passing. And Wichita is a busy city where no one takes the time to get to know you, except maybe in a bar. At the Festival if you wander into a campsite people will ask where you're from, do you play an instrument, and maybe even play a song for you. By the end of the visit you're both probably good friends and planning on contacting one another in the future, even if it's all the way across the country.

Margo the 33-year-old media specialist explains that in her apartment building, even though living in extremely close proximity to her neighbors, the structure and form of her living arrangement makes it difficult to see, let alone interact with others. She explains,

I live in a thirty-five story high rise in Midtown, Manhattan. I take an elevator to do my laundry, if I do it at all. In-house costs the same as laundry service and it comes back folded in an afternoon. And I can have just about anything delivered to my apartment after my doorman checks in with me. After three years I know three neighbors by first name, but we
have never invited each other over for conversation. My husband and I moved from Dallas where we knew all of our neighbors, their jobs, their sexual practices and borrowed things by simply walking in and leaving a note. In the city, there are so many people on the streets, in the restaurants and bars, when you get home you just want to shut the door and have some privacy. Winfield is easily the absolute opposite. Common camps, open conversations with just about anyone. I feel just as safe in both places, but I have an absolute peace and state of relaxation in Winfield, there is no comparison. In the city, I feel the stress and never really get calm until I leave.

Frederick Buechner argues that such narratives of home often conjure the notion of “true home.” Viewing this true home as a refuge and an anchor in an often chaotic world:

the word home summons up a place... which you feel, or did feel once uniquely at home, which is to say a place where you feel you belong and which in some sense belongs to you, a place where you feel all is somehow ultimately well even if things aren’t going well at any given moment (Buechner, p.63).

The nature of home therefore describes “a refuge in the world, a cozy, warm, place in juxtaposition to its immense, unknown surroundings, where people may regenerate themselves” (Vycinas 1961, p. 32).

Since individuals are increasingly mobile and spend significant portions away from home and home places, this uprooting “reinforces the need for human beings to attach themselves to a context that is unquestionably theirs, so that they are secure in the changing associations with place, society, and time” (Terkenli 1995,331). Consistently, festival attendees describe the setting as reminiscent of small town life whether or not they had experienced it before. They contrast the small, village atmosphere of the festival to the perceived and experienced
impersonality of city life. K.T., the registered nurse, states that “the festival is like the rural community I grew up in that no longer exists. Everybody worked and played together and if anyone needed help, everyone is there to help.” Steve, a 44-year-old musician from Colorado, explained that while at the Walnut Valley Festival, he likes to camp in the Pecan Grove. He states that the grove is more like Pemberville, Ohio, the hometown he grew up in than his current hometown. He explains that the festival, like Pemberville “is a community where everybody kind of knows everybody's business, and makes allowances and provides guidance and mutual celebration for each other.” Mirroring Steve’s sentiments, Maria, a 45-year-old insurance claim adjustor, sees the festival as a “throwback to simpler times” Though she admits that the nostalgia for these older, simpler times “even if they weren't really simpler” tend to idealize notions of small town community, the festival still provides “a total departure from stress and busy-ness of the city.”

In this chapter, I explored the emergence and growth of the portable festival camp. I examined the typical processes of planning, pilgrimage, land rush, and set up, stages through which participants progress in transforming festival space into a viable sense of place. In the following chapter I explore in greater depth the notion of portable community and examine how festivalgoers experience mobile festival sites as intimate, inclusive, and simple alternative to their hometowns and communities.
CHAPTER VII:
The Portable Community: Modernization and Mobility in Bluegrass Festival Life

In the previous chapter, I described the processual emergence of the festival camp and described how participants arranged the setting to create a set of distinct festival places. In this chapter I discuss in greater depth the interactional dynamics of the campground and the larger festival setting and describe the motivations underlying festivalgoers' participation in festival life. I also discuss in greater depth the portability of the festival experience and describe common elements weaving together the disparate and dispersed set of festival experiences peppered across the New West. Both as an outgrowth of and response to geographic mobility and transience, participants often traveled thousands of miles, and in some cases, overseas, to create and experience this form of community. Typically, they explained their attachment to this community by comparing its norms and forms to the values, lifestyles, and cultural opportunities they found elsewhere in mass or "mainstream" society.

The festival community provides an interesting case in examining both the impulse to flee and create community and place attachment. Whereas festivalgoers tend to congregate to form mobile and transient forms of community, the transience and mobility does not seem to weaken the bonds that are formed in its context. Rather, these bonds seem to become increasingly strong as time goes on, despite the fact that these communities exist for little more than a week at a time, and disband only to form at a different festival or at the same site the following year. Given that many participants in these festival communities
indicate their participation hinges around the weakened networks and impersonality of the urban or suburban, these individuals are not abandoning community but simply reconfiguring it in ways that fit their mobile identities and lifestyles.

Participants in these communities describe the intentionally planned and cultivated formal structures of the festival camp in terms of the forms of interaction and sociation that these sites evoke. Because there is a consistent logic from festival to festival and because the informal rules are transportable from one festival site to the next, participants find a reliable sense of place. The consistent forms of interaction therefore provide an "in" that facilitates and lubricates interaction between the festival's mobile participants who do not necessarily know each other.

The Portable Community

In the bluegrass festival setting, participants cultivated a particular form of community that is distinct from those which are geographically rooted or defined by physical boundaries of place (Hindman 1998). Usually formed around a shared interest or lifestyle, portable communities arise from their participants' mobility and transience. Participants in the festival traveled from their places of residence to attend festivals in multiple locales across the American West and beyond. Though a significant portion of festivalgoers sought out two or three particular festivals and attended them yearly, a smaller core participated actively in the festival circuit and attended as many as a dozen festivals each season.
While some festivalgoers would return home after one festival, numerous others would spend their summers traveling from festival to festival for several consecutive weeks or weekends. Promoters and volunteers independently operated and organized each festival, which left little formal coordination and provided a distinctive setting, cast of bands, and campground scene for each of the different festival events. However, once established, festival promoters hosted their event on the same or similar weekend each year, which invited participants to schedule yearly vacations or create their own summer festival circuit.

Despite each festival’s distinctiveness, bluegrass festival organizers designed events along a consistent and well-established set of rules, norms, and logic that produced a predictable and inviting scene across multiple settings. This consistency in form made it relatively easy for participants to step in and out of these festival communities and seek the experience of meaningful, communal interaction whether they were new to or relative veterans of the particular event. Strikingly similar to the form and structure of mobile communities in the Grateful Dead parking lot scene (Adams 1999), bluegrass festival attendees would often encounter some of the same individuals from one festival to the next. As a result of this repeated contact, members of the bluegrass community formed a stable sense of communal interaction despite a mobile locale and few obligations or commitments. Relying on a number of interactional codes, norms, and practices, participants created consistent and reliable forms of community that, in their view, were increasingly difficult to find in their home neighborhoods. Participants articulated three key motives to explain their interest and sustained involvement
in these portable communities: norms of inclusivity, intimacy, and simple and natural living

**Inclusion**

Festivalgoers indicated that their attraction to and continued participation in bluegrass festival settings stemmed from an overriding sense of inclusion, even when they traveled alone to a new or unfamiliar festival. Veteran members of the festival circuit were eager to demonstrate their relative expertise by walking a "newbie" through the potentially unfamiliar sights, sounds, and rituals of the setting. This made the transition between newcomer and experienced festivalgoer a smooth one. Across multiple festival sites, participants passed down a set of long-established interactional norms and practices that organized the behaviors of both new and veteran attendees. Common when entering any new scene or subculture, newcomers were introduced to and slowly made aware by those more experienced to the subtle nuances of each particular festival site and their corresponding unwritten rules or norms. These norms and rules allowed individuals to understand their expectations as members of the larger festival community. Certainly members of the community often excluded certain types of behaviors and were not accommodating to certain types of personalities that were not in line with the shared values of the group. Regardless of some essential gatekeeping to mediate setting-appropriate behaviors as guided by the desires of the larger group, its members prioritized inclusivity as a means to create a "space for belonging" (Duffy 2000, p.52)
To ensure tolerance and acceptance among wide-ranging groups of people, festivalgoers guided their interactions by this informal set of rules, which they referred to as the “festivarian code.” Flexible and emergent, this code consisted of an unwritten set of behaviors and normative practices that festivalgoers used to guide appropriate conduct within the setting. Similar to Sutton’s (2000) “deadhead code”—a system of informal “rules for everyday living” fans of the Grateful Dead establish to guide conduct in the Dead scene, the festivarian code also included norms or mutual respect of space, property, and person and required that one person’s enjoyment did not infringe on other peoples’ right to enjoy themselves. To be sure, each festival had its own particular written rules, which banned such things as pets, glass bottles, high backed chairs, Frisbees, or drugs from the main stage festival site. However, many smaller festivals left enforcement to the festivalgoers rather than to formal security personnel. Veteran members of the bluegrass scene made certain that any individual who failed to adhere to the norms of respect and reciprocity did not compromise the open, intimate interaction characterizing the various camps and campgrounds. Most infractions of the code were swift, carried out without severe or long-lasting sanctions, and included annoyed and dirty looks or a more pointed “you aren’t acting in the festivarian spirit” or “that is not acceptable festivarian behavior.” Most violators deferred without argument and corrected their errant behavior. Many participants indicated that when everyone at the festival adhered to this code, it allowed for stable and predictable behaviors in gatherings of three or four individuals to entire festivals hosting upwards of ten or twenty thousand.
Explaining why she kept coming back to the same festival for nearly twenty years, Mary, a fifty-year-old Kansas resident and citizen of the Frog Holler Camp, asked me pointedly “Honey, when was the last time you got this many different people all into one place and seen them all behave with manners? You just don’t get this anywhere.”

In his book *Outsiders*, Howard Becker (1963) noted jazz musicians’ tolerance for all sorts of deviant behaviors with little judgment or overt social control (Groce 1991; Tunnel and Groce 1995). Such attitude is reproduced in festivalgoers’ behaviors and responses. At certain festivals, participants dressed and behaved in ways that celebrated the carnivalesque and intentionally created space for audience members to express themselves. Scholars have argued that the liminality or “free space” at festival sites constitutes a politics of transformation through which participants explore and create alternative community forms (Turner 1969, 1982; Pratt 1990). In these spaces, societal norms, institutions, and categories collapse and coalesce into new forms that highlight the values of diversity, free expression, and autonomy not commonly associated with sites of public culture (Hetherington 2000). Recalling an experience at a Colorado festival, Casey, a computer programmer, mentioned that festivarians allowed considerable space for self-expression without the threat of judgment or social sanctions:

At Rocky Grass there was this guy who was dancing really funny and doing this weird thing with his leg— I imagine there were a few people poking fun at him, but most would look at him and say: that’s just his way of enjoying the music and everyone just walks past him. In other environments, people would make fun of him or attack him for being different.
Unless this self-expression prevented or otherwise interfered with other individuals’ ability to enjoy themselves, most behaviors were openly tolerated.

Though many of the festivals in this study celebrated difference and tolerance across multiple sites, different festival circuits often overlap and experience a clashing set of normative codes. Whereas participants in the “newgrass” or more progressive bluegrass circuit tolerated moderate levels of public drunkenness, marijuana use, and dancing near the stage area, most traditional or “old time” bluegrass festivals carried a more conservative, family friendly social atmosphere. Participants in these less tolerant bluegrass festival settings enforce their particular “family festival” code which imposed greater sanctions when the code was breached (including expulsion from the festival or even arrest).

This fuzzy and flexible line between codes was crossed by one participant and quickly restored by main stage bluegrass singer Doyle Lawson and his band Quicksilver. Performing the Sunday morning gospel set at a festival that featured both traditional and newgrass acts, Lawson spotted and called to a festive, tie-died dancer in front of the stage who was flailing to his own beat even after the music had stopped: “You sir, in front: Could you please sit down so the rest of those fine people in the audience can enjoy our show,” and retorted in a comforting drawl “That’s right. Everything’s gonna be all right” as the man sat down and the band began the next song. In this instance, the dancer’s behavior was deemed inappropriate for the Sunday morning gospel set by Lawson, a veteran of the more traditional “family” festival circuit. As a sign of respect to elderly members of the
audience who prefer to remain seated where they can view the stage, dancing is often restricted to the side of the stage or to the rear of the crowd in more traditional festival settings.

Though certain family festivals were less tolerant of certain deviant behaviors, both family and more progressive festival settings invited new and veteran participants into its long established rituals and traditions. These yearly rituals and time-honored traditions remained relatively consistent from festival to festival and region to region, which invited those traveling from out of town the opportunity to step into a familiar set of practices like campsite barbecues, contra dancing, and instructional workshops with relative ease. Other practices such as potluck dinners and homemade beer sampling similarly allowed relative strangers to meet and converse. Still other practices such as parking lot or campground jams allowed amateur musicians the opportunity to perform bluegrass songs with other musicians through the common language of the traditional or popular musical repertoire of bluegrass songs and time-honored instrumental or “fiddle” tunes. Because of her mobility, the festival setting afforded Becky, a 45-year-old attorney from San Diego, the opportunity to meet people with whom geography would have discouraged her from meeting or getting closer. Becky explained, “I like the fact that when I am traveling, bluegrass is an ‘in’ that allows me to experience a place in a unique way I would otherwise miss, including meeting people, seeing certain aspects of (local) community life, etc.”

According to Jodi, a 36-year-old therapist from rural Colorado who travels to a number of festivals across the west, the subtle simplicity of the musical
structure and form made the music "easy to play" regardless of the particular festival she attended. She mentioned that people playing bluegrass informally in the campgrounds and parking lots "don’t take themselves too seriously" that allowed other, less advanced pickers to join in a group session without the threat of intimidation or ridicule, and to participate regardless of where they happened to be from. However, there are limits to this welcoming behavior. In certain jam sessions, experienced pickers would often call out more difficult songs to "weed out" less experienced players or to initiate a newcomer into a faster, more advanced circle. Especially if the newcomer could not keep a steady rhythm or did not adhere to the etiquette of the jam sessions, more veteran players grew frustrated and left the jam altogether. Regardless, the jam would often evolve over the course of the evening to accommodate new members as others would leave for another jam circle elsewhere in the camp.

For many, the opportunity to jam in the campground defined bluegrass as a "participation sport." Comparing bluegrass to rock and roll festivals, Dave, a 32-year-old performer in a regional bluegrass band, asked ironically "when was the last time you saw a person at a rock concert look forward to jamming in the parking lot after the show?" Clarence, a 27-year-old banjo player who moved to Colorado from Kentucky, added: "When you go to a rock festival you don’t see people wheeling in their drum sets, electric guitars, amplifiers, and other instruments, but at a bluegrass festival you see almost everyone in the parking lot or campground with something to play." For Dave, Clarence, and numerous others, their draw to the bluegrass festival and culture lied in the opportunity to
produce and participate in rather than passively consume the music. Though other genres of music such as jazz, rock 'n' roll, and blues feature informal amateur jams, the simple chord progressions and portability of the instruments gave players an opportunity to participate in jam sessions wherever they happened to travel.

For these same reasons, open jamming or “parking lot picking” constituted an extension of, and perhaps even an alternative to, the main stage performance of nationally known acts. These participatory and inclusive practices invited a wide range of age groups and ability levels to participate. According to Carlton, a 38-year-old school administrator from New Mexico, during a bluegrass jam “it’s not uncommon for a teenager to be playing with a senior citizen,” or “a rancher or farmer to be playing alongside a lawyer or some hippie with dreadlocks” as Bob, another computer programmer, added. Highlighting the mixing and mingling of people with different educational, occupational and religious backgrounds, Ron, a 38-year-old computer programmer from Texas who attended many bluegrass festivals in the Mountain West, stated:

I often find that I am associating with people involved with bluegrass music that have political and religious perspectives that are radically different than mine. Where I live, many of the participants are political and religious conservatives. I am not, and yet we associate together to make music where ordinarily we would not get together... At the jam I regularly attend we also have participants with a spectrum of education levels, from tradesmen and laborers to university professors and administrators.

Recurrent observations by participants that the bluegrass festival settings provided an inclusive social setting appealed to those who traveled outside of their local area, sometimes across great distances, to seek community. Participants felt the
mingling of different social groups made for a comfortable and uncomplicated entrée into the festival and sustained a level of freedom in expression not readily accepted in other social contexts.

Although many participants claim that members represented diverse religious, educational, and age groups, the scene was overwhelmingly white. As the festival celebrated Anglo-American music traditions, and as performers or bandleaders of color were rare, participants felt the setting did not attract other racial and ethnic groups. Though welcoming of all races and ethnicities in principle, in practice the festival included very few participants of color, which several respondents found disturbing. A few female participants also noticed that the scene also excluded forms of gender diversity. They noted that, with a few notable exceptions, the main stage performances were predominantly male, and mentioned that the more advanced jams, though inclusive of females, could get so competitive that it turned them away. Despite these observations, the majority of participants felt that these settings provided a stable, predictable, and reliably safe and open place where they could participate in festival activities across multiple settings and locales.

**Intimacy**

Participants indicated that beyond the appeal of the music itself, they gravitated to festival culture because of the close, intimate nature of the setting. In these communal spaces, participants interacted in ways that were considered uncommon or inappropriate in other social settings. Whereas fences, property
boundaries, and security gates delimited social space in participants’ home communities, the festival sites were experienced as a therapeutic break from the isolation they experienced in their locked door communities. Respondents pointed to the opportunity to camp as a major factor in creating this liberating atmosphere because for the duration of the festival they lived in a shared social space. Curiously, when they set up camp or joined the morning tarp run, groups initially created boundaries between themselves and neighboring campsites or tarps by marking their territory with their belongings. Driven by a short-lived impulse to protect their private space and property, some constructed a clear, physical boundary around their personal camping or tarp spaces and between the end of their space and the start of the next. Shortly after all the camps and tarps were set up, however, their residents allowed strangers relative freedom to walk between or even through their site and often invited them to share their space.

Many participants compared the festival setting to their everyday lives and mentioned how the “welcoming and generous nature” of the festival attendees sharply contrasted with their experiences in “real life” or “out in the real world.” After explaining the utter shock she experienced at her first bluegrass festival, Ellie, a graduate student from Colorado, concurred:

We pulled into town at about one o’clock in the morning, right away there were complete strangers there welcoming us. Then, when morning came, I walked out of my tent and walked to the porta-potty, and had five people say good morning to me.... Everything I was looking for in a group of people I was finding already. When I wake up in the morning and walk to class, I pass at least five people on the way, and nobody says good morning to me.
For Ellie, the high levels of mutual respect and acknowledgment she felt upon arriving “struck me the most because it doesn’t happen in my day-to-day life.” According to Jerry a 52-year-old engineer and avid guitar player, at a bluegrass festival “everybody is immediately your uncle or your best friend. People may be literally camped right on top of each other, but everyone is immediately friendly right when they move in.” Because he and his wife often go to great lengths to construct a large and well-equipped camp, Jerry indicates that they try to “adopt” new, unfamiliar people into their camp.

At the Four Corners Festival, we see this young couple who were hiking into the festival with nothing more than their backpacks. They have their little tent and sleeping bags and bags of trail mix— that’s all they were going to live on for the entire weekend. And we say, “Well, come on over have a seat. You don’t have to sit on the ground. Here, have something to eat. Since we are all in this together, let’s share.”

For Jerry and his wife, they “put conscious effort into adopting people” in the campground because it got them to move “beyond the economic (status) thing” that tended to divide residents in everyday life. Because many participants like Jerry sought to intentionally reduce the borders and boundaries of the festival site, they allowed new and perhaps unfamiliar relationships to flourish among festivalgoers. Clint, a 28-year-old banjo player pointed out that the relationships he formed at the festival “are special and endowed with something that my other relationships are not. There’s a special type of bond that you have with these people. There’s a communal thing that goes on between people at a festival that is fundamentally different than my other relationships.” The festival enabled Clint to reveal parts of himself and express his emotions in ways he would not be
accustomed to in the context of relative strangers. Clint continued by explaining that participants accomplished this emotional intimacy interactionally:

It’s a very interesting way to see other people. You can see your nakedness because the whole setting breaks down the boundaries that often come between people in daily life. It’s pretty risky behavior to reveal your self to other people, especially strangers, but there’s a certain type of payoff here… because people will hopefully reveal themselves back to me. I definitely feel through bluegrass I form bonds a lot more quickly than the people I see and work with every day.

After experiencing the intimate interaction in the presence of relative strangers in the camping and festival area, many individuals like Clint claimed it also created a new sense of openness within themselves.

The often overwhelming feeling of intimacy participants experienced in the campground and festival represented a stark departure from their everyday work and home settings and provided a safe environment to interact with both longtime friends and complete strangers. Jade, a 28-year-old counseling graduate student and relative newcomer to the festival culture explained that in these settings:

There’s communal living that goes on that doesn’t happen in our neighborhoods at home. There are a lot of neighbors we don’t know, and we’ve lived there two and a half years and we’ve only now gotten to the point where we feel like we can swap keys with one of our next door neighbors.

Though Jade “would probably feel that (ideal) sense of neighborly connectedness and trust much more and more immediately at a bluegrass festival than I do in my own neighborhood,” others reported that they felt this high level of intimacy only at the smaller, less popular festivals. Jerry and his wife, for example indicated that they stopped going to the large festivals like Telluride (Colorado) in favor of the
smaller, family festivals like Four Corners or Pueblo because "these other festivals were getting too crowded and impersonal." Others indicated that larger festivals introduced a "different crowd" who were not fully socialized to the festivarian code, and who compromised the intimacy of the setting. These festivalgoers reported less trust and openness when higher levels of public drunkenness, drug use, and disrespect for others' property were apparent.

Regardless of the size of the festival, festivalgoers found that the boundaries traditionally found in venues of mass consumer culture tended to be non-existent or at least smaller and less intense in the festival setting. Within the informal jam and performances spaces, the audience, festival staff, and amateur and professional musicians intermingled and constituted what Jodi, 46, from Colorado, identified as "a social/ professional equalization in bluegrass music environments." Folklorist Neil Rosenberg (1992) supports this observation by pointing out that "the distance between the most successful bluegrass performer and his or her fans is relatively slight, whether measured in income or in the interaction between artist and audience at festivals and concerts" (p.92). Whereas most forms of popular music hinge on sharp and hierarchal divisions between professional "stars" and audience, the formal properties of bluegrass culture allow for a high level of sustained interaction between audience members and musicians. This intimacy became a significant draw for many festival participants, especially those who viewed it in sharp opposition to the impersonal and distant feeling they received from other, more "mainstream" or commercially successful genres of music.
Festival traditions like open jam sessions, instructional camps and workshops during the week of the festival, as well as formal instrument and band competitions\textsuperscript{16} effectively collapsed traditional distinctions between professional, main-stage musicians and amateur, parking lot performers. These workshops were designed to pass down the bluegrass folk traditions from established performers and instructors to a budding generation of jam participants and singers. The opportunity to spend a week or even a few moments with bluegrass legends signified a monumental experience for numerous festival participants. For many, the opportunities to converse and perhaps even play with main stage performers during instructional camps and parking lot picks were described as awe-inspiring experiences. Daryl recalled a memorable experience at a bluegrass camp:

At the academy, I decided to take in Peter Rowan’s song writing workshop. So I sat there and Peter starts asking folks to come up and play their originals for him so he could critique them and provide constructive feedback... Peter asks “who’s next?” My hand went up without the apparent permission of my brain- like divine intervention or something. The particular song I played references Peter in the second verse, and when I sang it, Peter’s head went back with a big smile! Towards the end of the song, Peter was singing harmony with me on the chorus! I damn near shit my pants! After I was done, he looked at me and said, “Now that’s a good tune- I could use one like that.” Do I really need to tell you what I was feeling after that?

Unlike many mainstream rock or country performances characterized by both physical separation (large elevated stage, amply secured back stage area, layers of bodyguards and droves of security) and symbolic separation (performers’ star

\textsuperscript{16} Instructional camps include instrumental instruction for every ability level and representing every bluegrass instrument, songwriting sessions, vocal instruction, tips on creating and sustaining a bluegrass band, tips on three-part harmony singing, and techniques of improvisation. Professional musicians and instructors, many of which are billed as performers on the main stages, staff these classes and informational workshops. Instrument and band competition finalists also often squared off during a portion of the main stage performance allowing them to transcend the traditional boundary between professional and amateur.
appeal, national recognition, and millionaire status) of performer and audience, it was commonplace to see professional performers mingling in the crowd, sitting in late night jam sessions in the campground and parking lot, and providing informal instruction to budding musicians. Diana, a jam session participant from San Francisco, stated that she was drawn into the bluegrass because of the overflowing generosity of the professionals “who are happy to play with and teach amateurs.” Steve, a guitarist from Colorado recalled a specific instance:

I remember practicing my guitar in my tent one night. Some unknown figure approached and began scratching at my tent. Come to find out, it was David Grier (a professional bluegrass guitarist) coming over to help me with a troublesome spot. Neat!

Respondents noted that the leveling of traditional popular music hierarchies and the ability to actually meet, converse, and perform with the main stage performers played a large role in their continued participation in the bluegrass community. Daryl, a 42-year-old designer and part-time musician from Colorado, stated that bluegrass is set apart from other cultural or musical events because the professionals are friendly, approachable and “not full of themselves.” These professionals were often found mixing and mingling in the crowd and campsites before and after the main performance. Through institutions like parking lot picking and instructional workshops and academies, the equalization of performer and audience member allowed participants to engage in a popular music culture without the rigid boundaries and hierarchies that separated other fans from rock, pop, and commercial country music stars.
Simplicity

Participants sought a break from the complexities and stresses of modern, urban living, and found this break in the bluegrass festival setting. For many, bluegrass provided both a physical and symbolic escape from the demands and values of urban living. Steven Sweet argues that Bluegrass music offers participants a symbolic backdrop that juxtaposes elements of modern and pre-modern living by “focusing attention backward” to a distant, mythical past or celebrating Appalachia as “a place where the past is attainable in the present” (Sweet 1996:34-42). Bluegrass historian Mayne Smith (1984) summarizes the symbolic import of bluegrass and old time music clearly:

There are many who see bluegrass as a product of exile from the country deriving not from rural life but from a yearning for it, and with its audience made up largely of people who share a romantic nostalgia for country living, whether or not they have ever experienced it (36). These images and lyrical themes sharply contrasted with the perceived negative aspects of the city. Participants expressed a romantic reaction against modernity, thus portraying mountain life as a place of interpersonal warmth in comparison to the impersonal relations of urban living (Sweet 1996). Though few participants would find life on the frontier an attractive one, they were attracted to its symbolic associations with a simpler, more natural way of life. Participants in the festival found that they were able to situationally shape and reveal themselves in bluegrass festival settings in ways that eluded traditional small town life.
Responding to a social world that they perceived as hurried and complex, and lacking the experience of interpersonal warmth and personal interaction they associated with neighborhoods and villages of old, participants sought refuge in the festival by returning—if only for a short while—to "a simpler way of life."

Lynette, a 48-year-old high school math teacher, described the typical bluegrass festival attendee as one "who desires to get back to living in a village sort of setting. It's a group of people who are looking to get back to basics." She indicated that the camping atmosphere mirrored the simplicity of the traditional small neighborhood in both design and function.

When you live in a small neighborhood, it's a lot like the campground. It's a place where you see and interact with your neighbors more often... because of the way small neighborhoods are constructed. You get removed from that when you move out into these new developments. People who are into spending the night and spending time with a group of people (at festivals) are the same people who want to live in a small neighborhood with a sense of community. People need to feel part of a village and that's what they want out of a festival.

Numerous respondents found the intimate levels of interaction mentioned above paradoxical because in their hometowns and cities, they seldom interacted with their neighbors. Jackie, a 38-year-old computer software technician found a stark contrast between the intensity of interaction in the festival setting and her neighborhood in suburban Denver. Comparing the bluegrass festival to communities of fifty years ago, she pointed out:

In the 1950s people would sit on their porch and drink their lemonade and talk to their neighbors, and now if you talk to your neighbors, they think you're weird. Now people have their new houses. Their garages are up front- you drive up, open the garage shut the door behind you and that's it! Playing bluegrass and being able to connect with one another, making eye contact and communicating with one another, it's something that we're
craving because we've lost that as a society. Especially out where we live in the suburbs.

Since the festivals in this study took place largely in the Western United States, some respondents found that the symbolic import of bluegrass music and festival settings were particularly relevant to the Western region and its current social context. For Clarence, people living in the West are attracted to bluegrass because many of them were transplants to the region, and were longing for a sense of identity rooted in place, history, and tradition they once found at home:

In my home state of Kentucky, traditions have been established and have been in place for a very long time. But here (the suburban West), this area is so new.... Consequently people are trying to seek out and find new traditions but in fact they are looking inside of old ones. It's sort of a Norman Rockwell fascination with a pastoral image of a past that never really existed.

Clarence explained the bluegrass festival drew a large number of mobile urban dwellers who came to the West from and yearned for the perceived simplicity of the rural lifestyle. Festival participants also found the setting a welcome alternative to both the larger cultural trends affecting the region and the physical and social environments characterizing their daily work lives.

Over the past decade, the Rocky Mountain West has increasingly become recognized as a center of high tech business and industry, and has become home to a number of technology industry leaders and Internet start-ups (Gardner, et. al. 2002). Even outside of the computer industry, individuals living and working in the region were increasingly likely to find themselves seated in front of a computer, machine, or other electronic device for large portions of their workday.
Paul, a Denver area banjo instructor, saw bluegrass festivals as a form of release from the stresses and strains of working with machines on a daily basis:

I think there is a real hunger for a deeper connection with other people, especially for those living in this high tech community. These are individuals that are on one hand, all eaten up with their technology and on the other hand are equally berserk over some detail of the banjo or mandolin. It's a natural fit. If you spend too much time in front of a computer, then having something, an object that doesn't plug into anything, and you can rub it with your hands in certain ways- just hitting parts of it and making sound come out of it- makes you feel human in a unique way. It's simply a need that isn't fulfilled in our daily lives.

Chuck, a web-designer and casual fiddle player explained that most bluegrass musicians like himself usually worked in “sterile, isolating settings” and turned to jamming with others at festivals as a release from an unfulfilling workplace culture. He lamented:

My work life is very anti-social, and it’s very much indoors. I work in a cube and stare at a computer all day, every day-it’s sort of everything that bluegrass isn’t. I find getting together and actually making music with people a great break. I think a lot of the bluegrass folks are in similar situations- they may be in jobs that they like, but it’s just a job. Bluegrass is a really nice outlet for community where you aren’t talking about computers or other work issues.

Participants like Chuck were drawn in because a large proportion of bluegrass performances took place outdoors and in rural areas physically separated from the “distractions” of urban life. The wooden, acoustic instruments, the natural environment of open-air amphitheaters or music parks, and the often-scenic backdrop constituted a physical and symbolic separation from the worlds and routines they were leaving behind. Of course, a few considered leaving the “real world” behind as neither feasible nor desirable, and ironically, many were required by their workplace to carry cell phone or pager during the festival.
Carlos, a long time participant of the Telluride Festival, described how the physical and symbolic separation from the rigors of daily life provided a source of renewal and re-enchantment for himself and his friends who traveled long distances to attend the festival:

Especially at a festival like Telluride, where you are in a gorgeous setting, and you have nothing to do but sit around and feed yourself and listen to the music- its fantastically liberating. You leave society, you go out, you have this epiphany, and then you come back this changed person. I definitely come back from a bluegrass festival definitely feeling somehow different, somehow changed, and somehow more alive.

Carlos explained that attending the festival gave him renewed energy and a different perspective to resume his daily routine. Soon after his return, however, he would quickly confront the stark contrast between the festival setting and his work environment, and the incongruity between, on one hand, the feeling of connection with nature and a simpler way of life, and his isolating office job on the other.

For some, the festival experience created a “deep change” within themselves prompting them to connect with nature or simplifying their life on a daily basis. Others approached the festival as a temporary break, and were eager to return to their cell phones, lap tops, showers, make-up, and SUVs at the conclusion of the festival. “I just couldn’t see myself living this way for long. Even though I never thought about turning on the TV while I was at the festival, I just don’t see giving up these things on a long term basis,” mentioned Sunny, a 33-year-old technology specialist. The festival experience forced him to “think about and reflect upon my current lifestyle and how I interact with others on a
daily basis, but it would take a lot for me to give up my fascination with computers and other gadgets."

For many like Sunny, the simple living he found in the festival was refreshing yet not something they were ready to adopt full time. On one hand, the perceived simplicity of the setting was associated with the celebration of basic elements of community and family life. On the other hand, this perceived simplicity was something that was viewed as inherently more authentic than other cultural offerings. Tunnel and Groce explain that “bluegrass is for many a point of identification, a music that would seem to express something ‘authentic’ about emotional attachments to family, home, and traditional Appalachian culture as well as a source of ‘affective alliances’ among fans jam session partners, and professional musicians” (Tunnel and Groce 1998, p.82). In his study of authenticity in country music, Richard Peterson (1997) examines how the music industry has used the perceived authenticity of bluegrass and early forms of country music to “fabricate” an experience and a culture that was seen as untainted by civilization. In one of its many senses, authenticity distinguishes what is “true, consistent, sincere, or real as opposed to the imitative, artificial, contrived, or phony” (p. 209). By stripping out the TV set, cellular phone, laptop computer, electricity, showers, and make-up, elements of the setting that could contaminate its simplicity, participants perceive it as being closer to what makes individuals naturally or authentically human.

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17 Lawrence Grossberg defines an affective alliance as a particular segment or articulation of a cultural formation; a configuration of texts, practices and people. (Grossberg, 1992, p.397).
In his study of Chicago blues clubs, David Grazian (2003) explains how the perception of authenticity in these clubs depends on individuals’ preconceived notions of what “the blues” are supposed to look like. Many people conjure images of the dark, dank, dingy and smoky juke joints in a shady side of the city, outside the reach of wandering tourists, complete with an old, raspy voiced black blues musician at the helm of a vintage guitar as their model of blues authenticity. It is this model against which more or less authentic performances of the blues are compared. Similarly, getting dirty, back to nature, living in close quarters with a well-connected community of festivalgoers, and with complete amateurs or perhaps real Appalachian bands performing music “the way it used to be played” becomes the model of authenticity in the festival setting.

Whereas mainstream cultural offerings connect with the ‘auditor-as-consumer,’ the bluegrass festival was described as providing its listeners and players with the opportunity to simultaneously produce and consume the music and culture. Closer to the authentic folk and traditional music ideal, this opportunity transforms the festival community member from passive observer into an active participant. Rather than interacting with a pre-fabricated cultural artifact that essentially consumes the listener, bluegrass players and auditors have some modicum of control over the production and consumption process. On a structural level, bluegrass supports an institutional and commercial network that exists outside the purview of media and telecommunication conglomerates. Bluegrass music and culture survive through a series of networks of small independent businesses such as local recording studios, independent record labels,
music stores, public or community radio stations, local and regional bluegrass organizations and clubs, and locally owned and operated performance venues (Fenster 1995). "Motivated more by their owner's and employee's devotion to the music than by hope of financial gain" these institutions and networks, Neil Rosenberg (1992) argues, provide spaces where artistic, lyrical and expressive control are left in the hands of artists and fans themselves. On an interactional level, the simplicity of the music and its connections to a perceivably more authentic time and culture in our collective past links the music and festival life more closely with the consumer than other modern alternatives.

Although bluegrass has become significantly more popular in recent years, an institutional and commercial network existing largely outside the purview of media conglomerates has supported the music and culture for decades. Participants in the festival explained their attraction to bluegrass by pointing to the fact that largely non-commercial, grass-roots institutions and networks guided bluegrass musical performance, production, and distribution (Fenster 1995, Rosenberg 1992). Pete Wernick, a banjo player from the band Hot Rize and former president of the International Bluegrass Music Society, argues that through strict control and planning, the bluegrass industry keeps the bluegrass traditions alive by blocking profit interests from "contaminating" what years of tradition have built. Unlike commercial country music, which is driven by "what's popular this year," Pete argued that those attracted to bluegrass music seek something that is driven more by the artists' interests than those of the recording industry. Paul
explained that bluegrass is still driven more by a team mentality than the cult of individual personality:

Bluegrass is still bands. The same people that cut the record are going to show up on stage. Not so with George Strait. The people that he records with plays with Alan Jackson and Vince Gill- they play with everybody! That’s why the records sound the same. The producers the arrangers are all about the same for all of the artists. That’s what I call homogenization. That’s what happens when someone gets corporatized, whether its sports or whatever, it gets reduced to this standard, common denominator.

Compared to mainstream American culture, festivalgoers explained their attraction to bluegrass by pointing to the fact that non-commercial, grass-roots institutions and networks guide the musical production and distribution and thus the community itself. Consequently, bluegrass music constitutes an alternative for many festivalgoers because it represents a genre perceived to stand in direct opposition to more commercialized forms that rely heavily on mass production, distribution and marketing.

It was widely accepted in the festival community that this style of music never has been and never will achieve sustained mainstream commercial success. In a number of ways, this avowed opposition to mainstream media networks and corporate distribution outlets signified one of its strongest elements of appeal to the community member. For Diana, a fiddle player who travels to Colorado from San Francisco to attend its wide array of summer bluegrass festivals, the non-commercial nature of bluegrass draws her and other festival participants from far and wide:

I like the fact that bluegrass is not attached to a wealthy, powerful media machine of any sort. The crowd and the types of people it attracts are not into commercial culture, materiality, appearance stuff. Pop music is
getting so canned and trite and bad; people are looking elsewhere and even traveling across the country or world to do so.

For travelers like Diana, the portable festival community drew her and significant numbers of others to the American West to engage in a setting that was perceivably more authentic than other, mainstream cultural offerings. Since she felt that these more authentic and simpler settings were in short supply in her home community, she sought out spaces in the American West where she could remove herself from the seemingly contaminating forces of modern mass culture. Peppered across the American West, these sites pulled an increasingly mobile subset of the population with the draw of inclusive, intimate, and perceivably simpler forms of community.

In this chapter, I introduced the notion of the portable community and explained how travelers to these settings sought out the intentionally cultivated norms of intimacy, inclusion, and simplicity that were seen in short supply in other sites of consumer culture. Countering feelings of community decline and isolation in their hometowns and cities, respondents tap into the modern trend of mobility and transience, two forces potentially disruptive to community life, but use these forces to create portable forms of community they can take with them on the road. The mobility of these settings allowed consumers to plug in and out with relative ease and the consistent forms of interaction in site allowed easy entry into the festival, even to the relative newcomer. In the next chapter, I explore the festival site as an alternative space for identity performance. Participants see their travel to and from the festival as a transition between the
"real world" and the "festival world." The distinctions between these two spheres of life allow them to break with everyday modes of living to get in touch with their "real selves." As a constitutive stage for identity performance, I address how participants re-shape their understandings of self and identity in the context of the festival site and carve out a space where they experience a sense of belonging. I then bring the festival to a close as I explain the often emotional process of tearing down camp and returning to the "real world."
Adorning the rear, spare tire cover of a white conversion van at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, a bumper sticker advertises the Four Corners Folk Festival in Pagosa Springs, Colorado: “The FESTIVAL WORLD is so much better than the REAL WORLD.” As a sociologist, I have been trained to realize that both places do indeed inhabit the very same world, a world tied together through local and regional economies, political, transportation, and communication systems, and flows of culture and capital. However, training aside, I often was reminded how far away these worlds seemed from each other while attending the festival. This distinction became increasingly clear to me, especially after numerous conversations with festival participants about these two very different worlds and my own experiences with leaving my schoolwork, schedule, teaching responsibilities, and dissertation writing behind. Cementing the distinction between the festival setting and the lives, identities, jobs, schedules, problems, politics, and responsibilities festivalgoers leave behind in the “real world,” this bumper sticker articulated the evolving discourse of the festival as an alternative space of retreat and a place of identity performance. While the isolated physical geography of most festival sites reinforce the impression that they are leaving their familiar worlds behind, the festival atmosphere temporarily inverts the temporal and normative logic of daily life and invites a free play of creativity and experimentation.
In this chapter, I explore the various ways in which participants experience and interact with the festival as an alternative space of identity performance. Getting away from the “real world” through a pilgrimage to the “festival world,” festivalgoers step outside of their “situated identities” to perform perceivably more authentic representations of themselves. They describe that the festival experience and setting allows them to reveal features of their identities that are often hidden or repressed in their workday worlds. In the previous chapters, I explored the transformation of the festival space into distinct and intentionally cultivated places and how these places provided nodes for meaningful and intimate forms of portable community in which participants performed a simpler and perceivably more authentic mode of living associated with communities of the past. The emplaced and often nostalgic framing of the musical performances and festival experiences “gives meaning to and situates the music within a discourse of (folk) identity and belonging” (Duffy 2002, p. 63). Participants use this framing of the festival experience to recapture elements of their selves and reclaim stable connections to their “real” or “true” identities. In the context of this chapter, I define identity as a performance that is publicly enacted and shared.

In the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman (1959) posits that presentations of self and identity are mediated by theatrical performances that are guided by our front stage performances; the roles we assume in daily life. According to Goffman, we often retreat from these public roles and performances to a more private backstage in which we can unwind, step out of character, and where we can “reveal what we imagine to be our more authentic selves to our
intimates and confidants" (Goffman 1959 in Grazian 2003, p.11). As a public stage removed from the trappings of everyday life, the bluegrass festival provides such a “backstage” space for people to reveal their true or authentic selves. However, as one traverses the frontstage and moves to the backstage, these backstage performances retain elements of the front stage. Even in this backstage of their everyday lives, participants are still performing and maintaining an image, a “situated identity” among their friends, peers and onlookers. Though experienced as a backstage to daily life, the festival setting becomes the new frontstage for public performance of festival identity, a stage on which participants enact their “real” or perhaps altogether different segments of their self.

Though participants in bluegrass festival life express an underlying assumption that they possess an independent self-identity or “real” self that they reveal to others in the context of festival space, these public performances do rely on an audience of fellow participants. Stoeltje (1992) argues festival action is “a combination of participation and performance in a public context” and “what is spoken, acted, or displayed in festival—public or private—anticipates a response” from others in the setting (Stoeltje 1992, p. 263). In the eyes of participants, these performances are based in part on “deeply felt inner understandings of the self (that) transcend both time and situation and are independent, at least in the short run, of the responses of others” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Zussman 1996, p. 226). However, as Wuthnow (1994) asserts, the group context solidifies and reinforces these performances. He writes, “what a person chooses to share in a group
becomes ever more important to that person’s identity. The group becomes ever more important to that person’s identity. The group’s affirmation of this identity reinforces and legitimates it” (p. 302 quoted in Irvine, 2000, p 15).

Straying from Goffman’s understanding of identity performance as role-playing or staged interaction, I follow Conquergood (1992) in exploring the potentially transformative potential of identity performances by examining their productive and constitutive potential. As generative practices, these performances are not “a reflection, nor even a representation, of given structurally and/or cognitively encoded identities” but constitutive of these identities (Henry 1999, p. 338). I demonstrate how a number of festival participants retell the experience of returning to the “real world” somehow changed, although often short lived and fleeting. Responding to the postmodern “problem of identity,” I grapple with the assertion that with the rise of post-industrial society, individuals are increasingly fragmented, saturated, populated, or fractured. Though festival participants experience many of the ills and troubles of cultural and social modernization, they retreat to the festival to reclaim what they determine to be a stabilized identity. I contend, however, that despite their narratives of revealing their “real self,” their performances of identity are generative practices that seek to resist the forces of cultural modernization. They step outside of their “real world” identities to reveal more authentic portions of their self but, in the process, open up possibilities for the transformation of these everyday identities as many (but certainly not all) return back to “real life” expressing a fundamental change in their outlook and behavior.
The Challenge of Postmodern Identity

For most living outside of the town in which the festival takes place, attendance requires an element of pilgrimage and travel as most festivals occur in areas removed from big cities and populated urban and suburban areas. The open, mountainous backdrop and the rural, isolated physical geography of these Western festival settings aid in the perception that participants are leaving the real world for a world of fantasy, creativity, and free play. They travel within or to the New West seeking out a landscape of authentic, natural environments that are sheltered from influences of mass culture and urbanization. Geographer William Riebsame points out that the New West is increasingly a place of retreat for lifestyle refugees (Riebsame 1997, p. 46). Starting with the third migration in the 1970s, mobile newcomers largely came to the mountain West from the crowded places in the east to enjoy its open, rural, and largely undeveloped landscapes. However, whereas 75% of residents of eastern states reside in cities, 86% percentage of westerners call urban and suburban regions home (Riebsame 1997, p. 55), making the reality of carving a truly rural existence in the West a daunting one. Unless one is independently wealthy, the majority of the jobs that would fund one’s move to the mountain West are found predominantly in regional centers or larger urban areas. These curiously high rates of urbanization for the West exist in a context whereby large tracts of surrounding open space and public land allow for weekend getaways and escapes from the hustle and bustle of city life. These pilgrimages to far away places, whether they be geographically remote
ski resorts, isolated national park campgrounds, spectacular natural destinations like the Grand Canyon or Yellowstone Park, or the tourist spectacles of Disneyland or Las Vegas are characteristic of travel in the American west. As a musical and creative playground, the bluegrass festival is increasingly among these prominent tourist destinations of the New West. As evidenced by extensive write-ups in local and regional newspapers, city and regional travel guides, and their prominence in the larger, traveling music concert and festival circuit, these events are becoming synonymous with New West life and culture.

Festivalgoers mentioned that the physical and symbolic distance from their places of work or residence allowed them to reveal parts of themselves that they may not be quite as willing to display in their daily lives. The physical separation between their urban places of residence and the rural, isolated festival site and the symbolic distinctions between the rules, logic, and routines of "real life" and "festival life" allow participants, if they so choose, to make a relatively clean break from their workday worlds when embarking on their voyage to the festival site. The physical separation of the Telluride festival and the symbolic separation from the markers of commercial life—office buildings, strip malls, chain stores and restaurants, and traffic—become significant in providing a space where participants can get away from "it all." As such, they experience the festival as a quite "other worldly" space in which they can get back to their "real selves," or perhaps "try on" different identities for the week.

In recent years, postmodern theorists of identity have argued that the rise and expansion of communication technologies such as e-mail, cellular phones,
and the Internet, the increasing efficiency and availability of transportation systems, and the acceleration of global exchange and travel have resulted in a literal explosion of possible nodes of identity formation. Because of the disorienting forces of late capitalist, post-industrial societies, the postmodern notion of identity is one that is increasingly fragmented and fractured, saturated (Gergen 1991), mobile and rootless. Whereas earlier, modern societies were largely characterized by stable, localized economies, communities, and fixed and highly interdependent social relationships, the modern “‘problem of identity’ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, (while) the postmodern ‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open” (Bauman 1996).

It is commonly argued that the free play of postmodern identity has been a thoroughly liberating and freeing development in recent decades, decoupling individuals from seemingly stifling and limiting social relations of modern times. Despite cautions that these forces have created problems of “multiphrenia” and “populated” selfhood in which “one begins to experience the vertigo of unlimited multiplicity” (Gergen 1991, p. 49), these social changes are assumed to be inevitable and here to stay. For participants in the bluegrass festival, however, they capitalize on the flexibility and mobility of postmodern selfhood by creating spaces of resistance from the accelerating and at times alienating forces of postmodern society. They participate in the festival in ways that reshape and resist the space-time compression and acceleration associated with postmodern society and carve out festival spaces in which they “slow down time.” They simplify their
often complex and chaotic lives in an attempt to reclaim a stable sense of self or self-identity. Karen, the 29-year-old counselor, describes that at the festival, she feels as if she is living decidedly “in the moment” as opposed to living “minutes, hours, days or weeks ahead” of herself. She describes that her experiences at the festival:

...just feel like utopia to me. When I’m at festivals most of the time I feel like there is no other place I’d rather be. I also feel very present and very in the moment. The quality of feelings I experience are in the moment. I’m not thinking about anything but that moment; I’m not thinking about five minutes from now or five minutes ago. Not only am I in the moment, I have no sense of anything else. I’m not thinking of any cares I have at home related to my job, anything like that that pops in can float right away.

Festivalgoers like Karen describe their weekend and weeklong retreats as a coping mechanism for identity saturation or fragmentation. Though their sense of stable identity is often fleeting and temporary, they use these events and festival spaces to “get back in touch” with their real or true selves they may have necessarily abandoned or compromised in their workday worlds. The festival experience, especially leaving these workday worlds and traveling to a space with a strikingly different temporal and social logic and organization, aids in the process of regenerating the self and of helping define or perhaps redefine one’s identity.

Through the process of ritual pilgrimage to the festival site discussed in Chapter VI, participants experience the festival as other worldly, and decidedly not characteristic of their workday world. Jillian, the 35-year-old educator, points out that the isolated location is a major part of the appeal of these festivals and that if located closer to urban areas, the draw would not be as strong:
JILLIAN: I think that it builds up the mysticism of the place when it’s difficult to get there and it’s out in the middle of nowhere. You know, that’s actually a huge criticism that people tell me they don’t like seeing music in the city because they can just look behind them and see the office building that they work at. And they don’t want to see that. They want to be somewhere so they can live this fantasy for a night or for four nights and be away from their lives. It’s not just like looking behind you and there’s an Arby’s. Getting away from it all—that’s why people go to these festivals—people want to get away from it all.

ME: What is “it all?”

JILLIAN: Well, I think it’s work. It’s a hectic life. It’s sprawl. You know, it’s traffic. It’s all that stuff. They want to forget about all that when they’re enjoying themselves. At the festival there’s not lots of traffic and you’re not yelling at people and you’re not spilling your coffee on yourself and your not, you know, looking at a bunch of strip malls, Generica.

Jillian mentioned that growing up just outside of the resort setting of Telluride in a less isolated and scenically striking working class town, that such a festival would likely flop there due to its working class roots and closer proximity to the “outside world.” Even though her hometown was a short drive from the festival site, the strategically placed Telluride Bluegrass Festival drew a significant crowd of over ten thousand, Jillian argued, because it was hidden away from the commercialization of surrounding cities and towns, in a community that has historically kept big box retailers and strip mall development out of its city limits.

The rural setting and physical backdrop of the festival also create a space where participants can “get back to nature,” a perceivably simpler, slower, and more authentic environment than their familiar cityscapes and suburban tract developments. By getting away from “it all” in the “real world,” participants pare the layers of socially ascribed roles, rules, and responsibilities to find or perhaps rediscover a performance of selfhood that seldom reaches center stage. Getting
closer to nature, simplifying one's environment, and relinquishing the need to keep up appearances are viewed as central to this paring. Festivalgoers described that the opportunity to camp in the outdoors, get dirty, and expose themselves to the forces of Mother Nature opens a space for their essential beings and impulses. As Tracey, a 34-year-old veterinary assistant from Ohio explains, the camping experience and getting closer to nature allows her to reveal elements of her true self that remain hidden in the day to day:

Winfield is a total experience in being yourself. There is no make-up required, you can get away with wearing barely clean clothes and only taking periodic showers, mostly just to feel better rather than to actually get clean and smell better. You end up following only enough of a schedule that gets you to the music you want to hear and instead of Palm Pilots and deadlines you are driven by hunger and sleep. It's also an exercise in surviving Kansas weather in a nylon hut so you can tell the survival stories back at work.

For festivalgoers like Tracey, getting back to nature allows them to get in touch with a portion of their self rarely exposed from the day to day. This more primitive understanding of self is believed to lurk below the “layers” of artificiality and various self-presentations that they felt they needed to enact outside of the festival. Instead of modern technologies and the voices of their bosses and other superiors, they listen to and respond to their perceivably more natural impulses of seeking food, sleep, ritual, and shelter. Curiously, through the process of getting dirty, letting their hair down, infrequent showering, and surviving the elements in the festival camp, festivalgoers free themselves from the demands and expectations of their daily lives to perform a more authentic version of themselves. Susan, the research scientist, explains how getting in touch with her real self results in somewhat of a letdown when she returns back to her regular
schedule and life. She confesses “I feel like a phony when I get back to real life. After spending ten days in this little bubble of a world, I really let my guard down, don't worry about my appearance too much, swear all I want, nap when I want. I feel much more ‘real’ at Winfield.”

In her work on high school reunions, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi (1998) asserts that each individual has a “personal identity” that is often in conflict with their “situated identity,” or their place among others. When away from former friends and classmates, especially after a long lapse in time, one has to negotiate between the self that they perform everyday and the self that they perhaps were or aspired to be at one point in time. Whereas the reunion is a site where this conflict is played out, the bluegrass festival is a place where this conflict is resolved, albeit temporarily, or at the very least confronted. Whereas participants in class reunions often need to negotiate their situated identity in light of a rather different or perhaps unflattering personal identity, in the festival setting, participants explain how this “situated identity” of the workplace is abandoned or temporarily suspended for the duration of the festival.

Although some may be “on call” or called back in to work from their vacation, or perhaps need to retain some semblance of their situated identity in the event they run across a co-worker or associate, most festivalgoers explain how they check their workplace identity at the gate of the festival or perhaps refrain from packing it altogether. Mary, a 27-year-old elementary school teacher from Iowa, explains that at the festival, she often takes on a quite different persona than the one she has at work. She reveals, “I guess that’s why most people have a big
reality shock when they get back from Winfield. Some would probably not be recognized at the festival compared to their regular lives.” Explaining how many of his friends experience the festival as a complete transformation of their identity, Steve, the musician from Colorado adds, “I know so many people who transform completely into their festival persona, then transform again into something altogether different when they return to their jobs and homes.” For others, the fact that their situated workplace identities are kept hidden or packed away for the duration of the festival is apparent in that many seldom know what their best friends or pickin’ buddies at the festival do in their daily lives. Illustrating this point, Melinda reveals that “there are so many people that I see there every year that I still have no clue as to what they do in the "real world," or as my friend Brian calls it the ‘fifty-one week supply run.’” Though revealed in jest, the idea that that the “real world” is merely the time we spend preparing for the next festival is significant in that many feel more at home among their friends and neighbors and in their expression of self at the festival. Melinda explains the obsession of many during the off season who expend a great deal of energy preparing for the next year’s festival and work hard to retain ties to the festival communities:

Those who most strongly differentiate between the “real world” and Winfield are often compelled to spend significant amounts of time and money reinforcing the difference between what happens the rest of the year, and what happens during the days of the festival.

As hinted at in Melinda’s previous statement, participants often spend a tremendous amount of time communicating with festival friends, recalling stories and memories, and debating how to best manage or respond to the yearly policy
changes in regards to the festival or festival space during the off-season. As discussed in chapter VI, they also spend a great deal of money purchasing camping equipment and gear, planning and constructing elaborately themed camps. Taking lessons and purchasing the best musical instrument continues this trend of monetary and time investment, in part, to impress their fellow pickers and to cement their identity as a serious musician. Through these off-season activities, festival participants negotiate the conflict between their situated (i.e. workplace) and personal (i.e. festival) identities by allotting more time and exploring more spaces in which they can perform their “real” selves.

From Real World to Festival World

The experience of feeling more “real” in the festival space further cements the distinction voiced on the back tire cover of the white conversion van between the real world and the festival world. For participants, the pilgrimage from home to festival spaces create a break in time, space, and setting described in Chapter VI leading to a distinction between the “real world” and the festival world. As the stage on which identity is performed changes, so do the rules of interaction and subsequent behaviors. Through transition into the festival space, participants experience a “frame shift” from everyday focus on subsistence, routine, and production to “frames that foster the transformative, reciprocal, and reflexive dimensions of social life” (Stoeltje 1992, 263). Through the process of pilgrimage, the liminality of the festival site gives travelers a means of breaking with their existing society and identifying with another (Hetherington 2000, p. 204
76). Karen explains that the festival temporarily suspends the rules and restrictions on behavior that we live by in everyday life. She explains "It's kind of like that social psychological principle that there are rules, and we live by them day to day. At the festival, though, it's different. It's like there are no rules, and anything goes." She describes how these rules (or lack thereof) are unique and specific to the festival site.

Festivals are this sacred space. It's this container, this closed off space, and there is this set of behaviors and people all fall in line with that, because this set of behaviors is very different than those that are expected of us out in our everyday lives. In any social situation there's this set of rules or the ways that it works, and at festivals it's different than our everyday lives, and it's a huge factor to have the stressors of everyday life taken away.

This brief, yet powerful feeling of "being outside of society and its structures" (p.97), Karen described a common festival experience in which individuals momentarily lost their sense of self-awareness and transcended traditional social hierarchies, a phenomenon that anthropologists refer to as "communitas"¹⁸ (Turner 1969, 1982).

As a result of the quite different logic and rules of the festival, participants frequently have a very difficult time describing their experiences and often find equivalent comparisons difficult to generate. Consistently in conversations and interviews, participants would stumble in their descriptions of the festival setting by explaining how those not part of the "special atmosphere of this secret, beautiful underworld" have no way of comprehending what takes place within its

¹⁸ This intense feeling arises through the process of ritual pilgrimage, a liminal period of ritual participation that Victor Turner (1969) describes when individuals experience a transcendence of hierarchy and travel through a "limbo of statuslessness."
boundaries. Respondents would often explain: “Outsiders just don't get it.” Or “It's impossible to describe to someone who has never attended. They just can't understand.” Interestingly, these participants would describe “the indescribable” as something that others, especially their friends back home and co-workers could not relate to. In this way, festivalgoers create a symbolic separation between the festival world and the world populated by non-festival friends, family, or co-workers.

This distinction is an important one in creating a separate space for alternative forms of identity performance, especially if these performances depart radically from the rules, roles, and responsibilities of their “workday lives”. Dylan, a 25-year-old theater technician from Santa Fe, New Mexico, reveals, “I often tell my co-workers ‘You wouldn't understand. It's a Winfield thing’ I mean, how do you describe landrush, or people lining up two weeks before they open the campground which is two weeks before the festival even begins?” By constructing Winfield and other festivals in this light, festivalgoers create a sense of mystery for their associates in the real world around what really takes place within festival boundaries as well as who they become. Melinda explains that she tries to relate her festival experiences to her friends who have never attended and gets:

several different reactions. They vary from ‘ooohhhhh, I wanna do that,’ to ‘ooooohhhhh, it sounds just horrid to live outside for that long.’ It's not for everybody, but those of us that have the fortitude and the drive to push the limits on fun, and callouses, and sleep deprivation, and laughing so hard that we snort.
Interestingly, participants will often describe the experience of "roughing it" in festival camp as something that their friends back home would never be able to handle. Somehow the sheer experience of battling the elements, sleeping in a rainsoaked sleeping bags in the biting wind, and trekking through the mud in the middle of the night to get to a nearly overflowing porta potty are just not attractive to those on the outside world.

These descriptions often led into an implicit message that understanding is only possible through direct participation and experience. The experiential quality of the festival implies that there is an immaterial or spiritual element, an atmosphere, which is often articulated as a "vibe," a "buzz," or a "surreal" feeling or community, kinship and connection with others (see Hetherington 2001). When describing the festival to non-attending friends, David, a 52-year-old technician from Missouri, tells them it is "impossible to explain":

I tell my friends there is no way to accurately describe it...you can only understand Winfield by being there. I mention ‘community.’ I use words like ‘paradise.’ But those don’t really do it justice. It’s really just one long jam session occasionally interrupted by food or sleep.

Though finding the words to describe the festival vibe and atmosphere is difficult and cumbersome, when I asked them to articulate this vibe or to describe how this atmosphere may compare to other settings, they point to the "instant camaraderie" they feel with other participants. Because they feel like they have found a special, little place hidden outside of other mainstream cultural, leisure, or tourist destinations, they feel that the relationships and bonds they form are like an "extended family," an "unrelated sibling type of thing," or as Sara, a 32-year-old resident of Kansas City, described it "lifelong kinship to someone you just met"
yesterday.” Though many have formed enduring, lifelong relationships with their fellow festivalgoers, the emotional intensity of relationships expressed by festival attendees has much to do with the realization that participants’ time together is short-lived and fleeting. Similar to the friendships formed as children at vacation spots or on a weekend camping trip or at weeklong summer camp, this emotional intensity wanes as participants leave the festival site and move back into their normal lives and schedules.

As festivalgoers travel to, build, and interact with the emergent festival camp as a distinct set of places, they begin to contrast the types of selves they enact given the social and institutional roles they must perform in their daily lives. Reflecting the perceived rift with daily life, participants experience the festival as an alternative “social situation” in which their “true” or “real” identity is performed. By removing themselves from the rules, restrictions, and responsibilities of the “real world,” festival participants create an environment in which they can retreat to their “real selves” and express themselves in ways that run counter to their socially ascribed roles and positions.

For example, participants explained that the open, creative atmosphere at the festival provided a relative freedom of expression, which allowed them to step outside of their normal styles of dress and decorum. Illustrated by a “festivarian dress code” that included elements of the carnivalesque participants’ display a montage of silly, impractical hats, colorful tie-died shirts and pants, and flags, banners and kites of various shapes, sizes, and colors. Adorning themselves in this festive manner, people at the festival exploited the open nature to adorn
themselves in ways deemed inappropriate in other social contexts. Clarence, a banjo player and computer technician from Colorado, described the fanfare at certain bluegrass festivals, and explained that:

people wear these zany outfits, and play with hula hoops, and fly kites and flags. I definitely like that sort of “fair” aspect to it. Everyone is always somewhat on display. No one is dressed up... there’s sort of a festival uniform that you wear. No one really wears what they would wear to work and I really like that.

According to Clarence, the playful, carnivalesque atmosphere allowed people to step out of their daily routines and outside of the rules, restrictions, and conventions of the larger society (see Bahktin 1984). Clarence, mentioned that this liberating atmosphere paralleled the “Harley Davidson thing” where “doctors, and bankers and lawyers get dressed in their leather and their scary gear and get to take on a different identity for a little while.”

Participants like Clarence explained that transition from real world to festival world signified a change in the rules and logic of everyday life but also provided an alternative stage for identity performance. They found this stage to be more accommodating of their quirks, personalities, and potentially strange behaviors and habits. Whereas they could be reprimanded or looked down upon at work or among their neighbors for this behavior, they described the festival site to be much more open and accepting; a place where they felt as if they belonged; a place where they felt “at home.”
What's in a Name?

One of the significant components of feeling "at home" in a community is the opportunity to be recognized by others and to be included in its web of interpersonal connections. As Rouner (1996) asserts, as human beings, "we want a place where we know people, and where we are known; a place where we can be somebody" (p.1). For attendees of the festival, especially those who stay regularly in the festival camps, they experience the festival as such a place. They express that the intimacy and openness of festival camping coupled with the web of relationships they build, allows them to indeed "be somebody" and carve out an identity that is inextricably tied to their campmates and other festival participants. A major factor in the creation of these relational identities is the formation of named and creatively themed campsites discussed in Ch. VI.

When I first experienced the "themed camp" phenomenon at the Walnut Valley festival, I began walking into the camps and asked their residents about the origins of the camp and camp members, the origin of their particular camp name or theme, their reasons behind decorating the camp, and their choice of décor. Usually these themes had something to do with an unexpected event, a rowdy conversation, or a particularly hilarious moment that occurred the previous year or perhaps several years in the past. Other themes revolved around the particular place of origin of the camp members or particular camp rituals as described in the last chapter. Regardless of the theme or its origin, participants not only felt a strong connection to the camp as a place, but also used the camp as a node for
identity. Through their public presence in the festival grounds, these themed camps “give a public description of the kind of people you are and, hopefully, will lure in others” as Jacob, 36-year-old college professor from Utah, explained. Harkening back to the theme of returning to a time that is more “primitive,” Jacob adds that the appeal of creating themed campsites “goes with the tribal thing. Each tribe must identify itself so that other distant tribal members will know where to gather.” More pragmatically, he admits that these names, “also make it easier to find one’s way home after drinking too much White Lighting.” He mentioned that his favorite personal camp tradition was the ceremonial “passing of the jar of moonshine.” He explains that “It’s nice to invite people into the camp that we don’t know. When we all drink from the same jar, there is a special kind of bond formed.”

Whereas identification with the various themed and named camps provide nodes of identity, they also construct difference and create markers of distinctions among the camp members. Michael, a 34-year-old newspaper editor from Wichita, explains:

I think there are probably numerous psychological and social factors at play here. First, setting up a camp with a theme, and invariably a name, satisfies that all-too-human craving to mark what is "mine," or perhaps more appropriately "ours," as opposed to everything else. Second, Winfield offers people stuck in boring lives to express themselves in ways they cannot in their day-to-day existence. For instance, an ex-employer of mine runs a small-town weekly newspaper. His profession keeps him at a Defcon-4 stress level every day of his life. A few years ago at Winfield, he set up an entire Old West cow town. He built a giant, operational windmill and constructed elaborate facades in front of all the tents and campers in his camp. He called it "Glitter Gulch." Then he went right back to trying to make payroll under a bank of blinking fluorescent lights in a building with a leaky ceiling.
As a resident of Glitter Gulch, Michael’s former employer created an alternative identity that provided a stark contrast from his daily grind in the working world. By constructing his elaborately themed and creatively decorated campsite, he crafted an alternative “stage” of identity performance and thus an alternative enactment of self. Additionally, this campsite allowed for him to create a quite different site of shared identification with his fellow campmates.

As sites of identification, some camps are quite notorious for their raucous, late night partying like Split Lip Rayfield, while others are known for their sobriety like Friends of Bill W., a campsite named after Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson, which is a safe, welcoming place for recovering substance abusers. Still others like the Carp Camp tend to be known for their over-the-top festivity and creativity, while those like Comfortable Shoes or the Mash Camp are known to be a site of the best bluegrass jams in the campground. As a member of these camps, one carves out a personal and group identity by identifying with and being identified among and against others. As public and commonly recognized places, participants build creatively themed camps to perform an alternative identity. Many essentially become characters in the enduring and unfolding story that is the history of the festival campsite. Many of them become local celebrities, notorious characters, or prominent members of the community as they are identified with these particular camps. These characters emerged through the “roles” of camp host, camp member, picker or jam musician. For example, as Walnut Valley folklore has it, an unfortunate and unexpected soul stepped into the vacant porta john to do his usual business. One
festival participant explains the “Chem Can Larry” incident in all of its dramatic glory. Marian, a longtime attendee of festival, explains:

Some of the larger camps use these huge cargo parachutes that they hang from the trees and use as shelters, under which they sit out of the sun and/or rain, and do campground picking, and other activities. You know how they have rows of porta-pots in the campgrounds, well, anyway, one early morning the honey wagon had been making its rounds, servicing the facilities, and during the night, the wind had loosened one of the guy lines on a nearby parachute, as the truck drove away—remember this actually happened, and is not a joke— it snagged this line, dragged it over the end porta-john, and pulled it over. One of the campers had just gone in, and you can guess the rest. They drove off, not knowing anything was amiss, except the poor guy inside knew it. He started yelling his head off, of course, and finally some fellow campers came to his rescue. They found him inside with the porta pot lying door down. Fortunately, since the service had just been done, he came out blue instead of brown.

As the story of Chem Can Larry circulated across the campground and across the years, Marian mentions that various other suggestions of names for this character have come out, like Larry Blue Boy or The Man in Blue. Indicating his notoriety, people have made Chem Can Larry buttons and t-shirts and have even constructed an impromptu historical marker by the side of the porta potty to commemorate the incident.

Other festival characters have also found their mugshots, sometimes unexpectedly, adorning the front of a t-shirt. Tom Haver, after finishing among the top three in the mountain dulcimer championship for several years, arrived to the festival determined to land himself in first place once again. Without his knowing, his friends made t-shirts and buttons and distributed them far and wide across the campsite to “psych him out” and poke fun of him for his perceived hoarding of the competition’s awards. Though immersed in serious preparation for the contest, he began to question his sanity as he began to see his image
appear in bathrooms, posted on trees, on dumpsters lining the path to the festival stages, in short, nearly everywhere he looked. The display of Tom’s image as a prominent festival character who, recognized by many longtime attendees, became the target of their playful musings, illustrates how everyday participants in the festival, over time, can become celebrities of sorts. Additionally, the stories of Tom and Chem Can Larry solidify their position within a vibrant network of festival friends and neighbors who depend on each other’s presence at the festival to anchor the setting’s intimacy and familiarity.

Because each member of the community provides one of many nodes in a network of festival relationships, the thought of missing a festival, regardless of the reason, becomes more than an inconvenience or subtle disappointment for these attendees. The realization that one cannot attend, especially for the most dedicated veterans of the festival, can be a letdown because it symbolizes that they will be a missing piece for others’ festival experience. No relation to Chem Can Larry, “Flat Larry” was a longtime participant of the Telluride Festival who, due to health reasons, was not able to attend. He was supremely disappointed not only that he would not be in attendance and be part of the festival experience first hand, but also that he would be somehow missed by his fellow campmates. To rectify the situation, Jo Anna, a fellow e-mail discussion list participant suggested to Larry that he create a flat, cardboard cut-out image of himself and send it to her so that he would still be able to attend the festival. Jo Anna, a grade school teacher, explains:

The idea was mine, although not entirely original. School children have been doing similar projects for years, inspired by a book called Flat
Stanley. There have been many variations, no doubt. When Larry, a list member whom I have never met, said he couldn't go, I suggested that he do the flat thing. With the help of his daughter, he made the flat version and "mailed himself" to me. We carried Flat Larry to as many list activities as he could get to, had his picture taken with (main stage musicians) Tim O'Brien and with John Cowan, and even went backstage and had all sorts of adventures at Telluride.

Jo Anna and her campmates carried the cardboard likeness of Larry throughout the festival and had longtime friends sign and send messages to Larry, took pictures of Flat Larry in various festival situations, and even snuck Flat Larry back stage to steal a few pictures with the main stage festival performers. Not only was Larry able to attend the festival vicariously through his likeness "Flat Larry," but also the festival was able to experience the presence of Larry even in his absence.

For dedicated festivalgoers like Larry, the realization that he would be missing the festival comes at a cost to his festival identity. For these dedicated fans, the thought of missing the festival for any reason and especially their opportunity to reinforce their relationship among their festival friends and family is a serious blow. Tom Haver explained the great lengths that he had to overcome to get to the festival one year:

Back in July, my mom scheduled my step-dad's 75th birthday party in Colorado Springs - for the Sunday of Winfield Week. By the time she realized the conflict, several family members had already booked non-refundable airfares from around the country. I definitely did not want to miss the brunch, so I said I'd drive back from Winfield on Saturday, to get home in time for the Sunday morning drive to The Springs. My son, Steven, was coming to Winfield from Nashville, and didn't want to miss Saturday night. Since my van held all the tents, sleeping bags, coolers and food, he would have been out of luck after I left. My Daughter, Stephanie, was only willing to miss one day of school, so she was planning on flying down Thursday night. The thought of driving back with me Saturday morning, essentially having only ONE day at the festival, was very
unappealing. I asked if she wanted to punt and stay home, rather than have only Friday in camp, and she said "absolutely not. I've gotta go to Winfield."

As for myself, though I am a mature adult who understands that one must occasionally make sacrifices, I was bumming out over missing the now-traditional Sunday night "decompression jamming" and walkabout, and the Monday knock-down of the River Rat camp. So rather than cut everything short... Wednesday after setting up camp, I drove to the Wichita airport to meet Steven and Jordan, his girlfriend, who flew in from Denver about the time he arrived from Tennessee. Back to camp by about 11:30 pm. Thursday evening, I drove to the airport again, to get Stephanie. Saturday evening, Steven and Jordan drove me to the airport, where I caught a flight back to Denver. Next morning, my wife Jill and I drove to the birthday brunch, while the kids are hanging out in the Pecan Grove. Sunday evening, Steven, Jordan, and Stephanie drive the van to Wichita, and catch their flights to Denver and Nashville. Meanwhile, Jill drives me to Denver International, still in my sportcoat and tie, where we meet Stephanie and Jordan arriving. I get on the plane they just exited, fly back to Wichita, snag the van from airport parking, and arrive in the 'Grove at midnight, still wearing coat and tie. A rapid change of clothes, and I'm back at it, pickin' in the campground until nearly 7:00 am Monday. Slept 'til about 10:30, then up and at 'em to pack up the camp. The parachute finally came down at about 8:30 pm, and by 9:00, the caravan of remaining rats left the campgrounds for Greg and Gail's house in Wichita. Hit the sack, then hit the road Tuesday morning. How's that for a story of insane allegiance to the festival?

For another festival e-mail list participant and festival character, "Telluride Tom" the unofficial "mayor of Town Park," the festival's coveted on-site camping area, found out that due to financial reasons, he would be unable to attend the festival. When the members of the discussion list caught wind, that he would be breaking his twenty-plus-year streak of consecutive festivals, and realized that the "Town Mayor" would be strangely absent, they chipped in money to purchase him tickets for both the festival and Town Park camping. Because of his enduring attendance and his prominent position at the festival, in 2003, the festival sponsors, Planet Bluegrass, awarded him with a "certificate of appreciation," which entitled him to a complementary Town Park pass "for as
long as he wishes." Interestingly, a Town Park celebrity of sorts, Telluride Tom has his own website (TellurideTom.com) dedicated to his festival persona. In fact, his website includes its own chat room where festival participants can meet up and chat in virtual space to discuss bluegrass music, upcoming festivals, and enact their festival identities during the off-season. Being a prominent member of the Town Park community, Telluride Tom situates himself as a hub of community activity and is active in planning and organizing pre-festival activities for its residents. The previous stories of Chem Can and Flat Larry, Telluride Tom and Tom Haver illustrate how the festival, over time, lends itself to the creation of characters and personalities meaningful only in the context of the festival. Unlike the possibilities of becoming notorious or famous in their daily lives, festival participants felt like the camp provided a place where they could "be somebody."

The same festival that Telluride Tom received his award marked the Telluride Bluegrass Festival's thirty-year anniversary. To commemorate the landmark event, the evening before the festival officially began, campers in Town Park were treated to a slide show portraying the various characters, events, and memories over the past thirty years. Though most of the events, memories, and faces were largely unfamiliar to me, the ebbing and flowing crowd of roughly one hundred who circled around the impromptu yet quite elaborate projector and sound system clearly identified the characters in the brief festival history with oohs, aaahs, laughter, and cries of "oh dear, look at Jim! He must be only 20 in that picture!" For oldtimers, the slideshow provided a time of reflection and remembrance of their experiences and the creation of new friends and family over
the years. For relative newcomers like myself, the slideshow and the intimacy of
both the pictures and the warm responses to the various festival events
indicated that the festival was an important part of these people’s lives and
foreshadowed that I, too, may become part of and attached to the collective
experiences at the festival.

**Tearing Down and Leaving the Festival Camp**

As the festival winds to a close, and the approaching Monday morning
looms ever more closely, one by one, participants begin to withdraw from the
festivities and stick closer to the “home base” of their camp. By this point in the
festival, participants are usually suffering from extreme sleep deprivation from
staying awake most of the night, drinking moonshine and corn whiskey, or
participating in campground jams and other socializing activities. There is also the
sobering realization that soon they will have to begin dismantling their campsites,
packing their vehicles, and returning to their workaday lives and schedules. On
this other end of the festival pilgrimage, the return back to “reality” or the “real
world,” festivalgoers experience a flood of different emotions and sensations
ranging from exhaustion, depression, hangover and sadness to harmony,
rejuvenation, restfulness, and relaxation. Festivalgoers experience the return back
to the all too familiar schedules, routines, and workaday responsibilities in stark
contrast to their previous week or weekend. This contrast cements the distinction
between the festival world and the real world instigated during the early stages of
the festival pilgrimage. Karen the 30-year-old counselor from suburban Denver,
Colorado links this withdrawal as a necessary way to reintegrate herself into her daily routines after immersing herself in such a communal environment. She explains:

As the festival comes to a close, I experience a flood of emotions. I get very introspective at the end. I find that I do not get out and about connecting with other people. I started to pull back at the end. I generally experience a lot of gratitude from the experience, but I feel like I have to remind myself of the gratitude because there is a lot of sadness and loss at having to go back to my life. Part of the realization is that I feel like maybe I would never get the chance to recreate these feelings again. It’s not yet a feeling of loneliness, but a fear that I would feel lonely after having lived in this real communal kind of environment and then not being able to see my friends again, even after a two day break, because I felt I became very connected and close with my friends and didn’t want to be away from them.

At the end of nearly every festival, the process of withdrawal is evident as participants are considerably less jovial and lighthearted as they begin the daunting task of collecting their belongings and packing up their camp. Many are slowly coming to the realization that they need to return home, unpack the car, and prepare themselves for the upcoming workweek. However, while others are withdrawing, a few participants try to hold onto and savor the last remaining moments of the festival. Though he would like to stay in the space he has created over the course of the week, Jerry, the 50 year-old mandolin and guitar player and member of my informal Monday jam group, explained how the setting just isn’t the same once people begin to pack up and leave:

Breaking camp is definitely a phenomenon. We usually stick around after everyone else has gone on the last day because once we get camped in, you bring in all of this stuff, it becomes your home and you don’t want to leave. Besides being a pain, it’s really sad. Its like you look outside your house and you see all of your neighbors packing up and leaving. If you were not packing up and leaving, you would feel abandonment and feel like you were going to be left some ghost town. You pack up and leave as
well, because in staying there, you are in the place but you aren’t
inhabiting it as a neighbor. And I say it’s sad, because you’ve lost that
church. You know you are leaving and going back to your normal life. A
few days later, it’s not with you... It’s not going on anymore.

For most who won’t be attending a festival until the following year, they try to
savor the time that they have remaining because it will be an entire year before
they inhabit the temporary home places and join with their festival friends and
neighbors. “When it evaporates, it’s gone until next year, so you gotta squeeze all
you can out of each second while the opportunity exists” states Ronald, a 40 year-
old electrician from Virginia. While others like Kristen withdraw into herself and
Ronald and Jerry try to take each remaining moment as slowly and preciously as
possible, others gather together with campmates and perform symbolic traditions
to commemorate the end of yet another festival. Steve, the funeral director and a
longtime member of the Carp Camp, states that the symbolic “lowering of the
carp” signals the end of the festival for her and her campmates. “We all get tears
in our eyes when we "lower the Carp" and hum "Pomp and Circumstances."
Gloria, a member of the Metaphysical Camp, explains that she and her campmates
gather Sunday morning “before we tear down the big tent” and “all sing songs
together that were written by fellow campers.” She explains her yearly ritual as
the festival winds down:

I have taken to spending Sunday night in camp, to decompress, and have a
relaxing knock-down on Monday. It is a sad time, but we always make the
best of it, by conducting traditional ceremonies like planting spring bulbs
in our tent stake holes, or sharing one last beer or champagne, to
remember our loved ones as the camp has lost several buds over the years.
But really it’s to celebrate the future we all look forward to the next
September.
For many festivalgoers, the sadness begins to bubble up as they come to the realization that they will need to say goodbye to their longtime festival friends or perhaps part ways with altogether new one’s. For others, the symbolic end of the festival is a signal that they have to begin thinking about their transition back into the “real world,” their “real lives,” and perhaps withdraw from their “real selves” as they don their workaday uniforms and enact their workaday roles. As the flip side of the pilgrimage, the return home and reentry in to normal life is experienced as thoroughly difficult and disorienting. Often it takes festivalgoers several days to “get back to normal” or “to get back in the groove,” an experience that multiple participants described as a “festival hangover.” This festival hangover is experienced as both an emotional and physical adjustment to returning back to normal ways of living.

Explaining the physical component, Kristen, from Florida, describes that the festival does not always lend itself to the healthiest style of living, and states that she strays from here normal weekday resolutions: “I’m going to get my 8 hours of sleep” and I’m going to eat healthily,” and “I’m going to recognize my limits.” She states that she I likes to be “balanced in my daily life” but experiences “a sense of incredible high at these festivals, and there is usually, coming off of the festival, a matching low.” For others the experience of leaving the festival is much more emotional. As Jo Anna described, “there is a tremendous let down when I break camp and return to the "real" world. I know it will be 50 weeks until I get to return. Fifty weeks in which I will be forced to struggle with the ups and downs of everyday living. It takes a year to get over Winfield, and it
takes Winfield to get over the year.” In comparison to the rest of the year, She explains that the two weeks she spends at Winfield “are like floating on a cloud, free from the cares of the world. Returning back to her city life, Margo, the woman from Manhattan describes this emotional feeling bluntly: “It's a wrench. It really shines a spotlight on the chaos and stress of life in New York City. It certainly takes a few days for me to get back in the swing of things here.” Moe, a 42 year-old artist states that “after Winfield, I feel like I've been dropped from the sky and landed smack in the middle of my life.” Deena, the medical entry specialist, concurs and describes her slow reentry back into her normal life.

After the festival, I always take Monday off. After five or six days of only three or four hours sleep, you have to rest. I end up taking naps between loads of laundry that smell like campfires. The first day back at work is a complete fog. You can't describe Winfield to them so you just say you had a great time and hope no one asks you to think to hard. Second day back at work, I'm slowly coming back to reality. Half of me is still at the festival, while the other half is here struggling at work. Every day just gets closer to reality and you just start looking towards next year.

Though they dread the long drive back home, unpacking the car, airing out the tent, and the slow transition back to “reality,” many participants feel glad to regain a sense of privacy, sleep in a warm bed, and abandon their campfire smoke laden clothing. Though many merely go back to their daily lives a bit tired and clothes and camp gear a bit soiled, and dive right back into their daily routines and ways of living, others claim that the festival experience elicits deep change and a new, fresh perspective that they take with them back into the real world.

Though Victor Turner argues that the change of status and the upending of social order is returned back to the status quo after the ritual pilgrimage, festivalgoers
like Maggie, the account specialist for a sporting goods company, often report feeling a sense of change:

When we break camp and return home I am in good spirits, in fact it just makes me anticipate coming back next year and meeting even more people and seeing the friends I made again. I also almost feel cleansed in a way. I have gotten back to the basics. Camping is so refreshing. You get away from your mundane daily routines. You realize that there is more to life than just the nine to five company you work for. You free yourself to art and music. You breathe! Breathe the beautiful clean crisp air, live amongst the trees, and bask in the warm comforting sun. It’s liberating and so peaceful. I come back to work a completely new person.

The transition from festival world to real world is certainly a disorienting one. Through many experience the tail end of the pilgrimage back to their “familiar place” as a positive one, festivalgoers also experience a lost sense of communal or liminal place constructed in and through the festival pilgrimage. While some begrudgingly return back to their familiar lives and jobs and while others have a renewed sense of energy and perspective, still others are left with a sense of wonderment about the strikingly different logics organizing the festival and real worlds. Questioning the reasons why at festival’s end, we have to return back to a perceivably inferior way of living, Lawman explains,

You always leave with the notion that you'd like to live like this all the time, in a communal setting, no job, no alarm clock, playing music all the time, eat when you want, stay up as late as you want, wake up when you want. Why can't life be that way? It's also a sad affair to have to leave all the friends you only see once a year or the new friends you've gained over the last few days. And hey, you spent all that time setting up your little "neighborhood" and now you have to tear it down. There's something very wrong about that.

While droves of festivalgoers like Lawman and Maggie return back to their daily routines, Jerry, who bears a remarkable resemblance to the Grateful Dead's Jerry
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While droves of festivalgoers like Lawman and Maggie return back to their daily routines, Jerry, who bears a remarkable resemblance to the Grateful Dead's Jerry
Garcia, explains that the festival atmosphere keeps him longing for more. Explaining what happened at the Four Corners festival last year as he and his wife were breaking down camp, “someone said ‘Winfield in three weeks.’ We said ‘lets go! lets go! Lets keep this thing going, This is fun! Lets go to the next one.’”
CHAPTER IX:
CONCLUSION: TRADITION, (POST)MODERNITY, AND THE QUEST
FOR COMMUNITY IN THE NEW WEST

In the previous four chapters, I traveled through Appalachia and the early
days of bluegrass music and culture to the New West where participants
assembled and performed a sense of place, community, and identity in the festival
camp. In the spaces between, I examined how individuals attracted to bluegrass
music and culture sought out the bluegrass festival as an “authentic” and mobile
alternative to the anomic, isolating forces associated with postmodern life. In this
concluding chapter, I return to the themes introduced earlier in this study to
explain how the bluegrass festival movement in the New West fuses tradition and
modernity to grapple with challenges of courting community, developing a sense
of place, and developing a regional identity in an increasingly mobile society.

Selective Traditions: From Old Appalachia to New West

Surrounded by a context of a rapidly developing, rapidly changing west,
participants in the bluegrass festival sought shelter under the nostalgic canopy of
the festival site. In his study of Old Pasadena, California, Dickinson (1997)
contends that times of rapid change and insecurity are characterized by a deep
desire for places of memory and nostalgia. Visitors to these places engage the
cultural symbolism of these landscapes of memory, and find anchors for identity
in their “stabilizing and authenticating past” (p.1). Providing a space and a
grammar for the rhetorical performances of self and community, public places of
consumption like “Old Pasadena” locate the self in a contemporary setting but do
so in the nostalgic context of a seemingly more authentic and idyllic past. At the bluegrass festival, the symbolic associations of Old Appalachia echoed through the bluegrass song mixed and mingled with the physical setting of the festival to create a backdrop for strikingly inventive performances of place, community, and identity. Over the course of a weekend, travelers converged on rural, rustic mountain towns to celebrate bluegrass music and culture. In the process, they constructed lively campsite communities that developed, over time, into vibrant villages that participants created year after year. Tapping into their geographical mobility, and fueled by rapidly changing home landscapes, these participants in the festival pilgrimage sought refuge under the perceivably simpler, slower-paced canopy of the festival camp.

As a "popular form of the American historical imagination," (Cantwell, 1984. p.18) bluegrass music has prospered from "the one commodity which in America is ever in short supply- the past" (p. 13). The renewed interest in bluegrass music and culture in the New West signified a turning from norms and values of mainstream society to those past ways of life believed buried by mass culture and mainstream, urban and suburban lifestyles. As a cultural revival, participants in the New West bluegrass scene selected images from the storehouse of Appalachian and Old Western cultural memory to create alternatives for community and place identity that were not readily available through venues of mass culture. Folklorist Burt Feintuch (1993) explains the revival process as one that revives the musical forms while selectively re-creating memories of both history and lived experiences of the past:
The term revival implies resuscitation, reactivation, and rekindling... But rather than encourage continuity, musical revivals recast the music- and culture- they refer to. They are actually musical transformations and a kind of reinvention.... Each revival achieves its own momentum with its own standard repertoire and styles and its own selective view of the past (Feintuch, p.184)

In this light, this contemporary bluegrass revival in the New West illustrates what Raymond Williams calls a “selective tradition”: a process that rejects “what was once a living culture” by “paring away of those characteristics and features deemed inappropriate and a reorganization of what is left” (Williams 1958). In a New West context, participants mixed the intimate, down-home feel of Appalachia with the open spaces, modern conveniences, and mobility that eluded communities of old. They crafted the festival site in ways that referenced the cultural symbolism of Appalachia and enact its traditions and rituals in ways that celebrated the region’s social, communal elements. In the process, these performances “pared away” the poverty, domestic violence, and working class lifestyle that are often associated with Appalachian life.

Liberated geographically and culturally from the Appalachian region, participants in the New West bluegrass scene glorify Appalachian life in ways that residents closer to the realities of the region cannot. Kristen, the native of Kentucky introduced in earlier chapters, points out that economically and culturally, her circle of friends who attend bluegrass festivals in the West do not
have adequate “closeness” to understand fully the realities of Appalachian life. She explains,

most of the people we run around with (in Colorado) are highly educated people, fairly well to do, and able to afford to go see music and go to festivals. Their world is separate geographically and emotionally from some of the other negative associations with Appalachia that people back home have.

In her explanation of the underappreciation of the realities of Appalachian culture, Kristen highlights an important contradiction within the bluegrass festival setting. Though fans attributed their interest in the festival as rooted in the genre’s symbolic associations with “simple” living, they performed “simplicity” in the festival camp in ways that were seldom more than a few steps away from modern conveniences of home. Though camped under tents and “roughing it” through the harsh elements of Mother Nature, they often carted in accoutrements that, though simple in design, were hardly characteristic of early American community life.

In the same way that bluegrass fans experienced the imagery and mythology of Old Appalachia as an over-glorification of the simple, rural life, the New West continues to provide a similar, idyllic grounding for those living both within and outside of its borders. Though the “natural, beautiful West” is characterized by the wide open, scenic splendor of the Rocky Mountains, it is also home to the “ugly west” characterized by sprawling “cookie cutter” suburban developments, nuclear weapon test sites, toxic waste storage facilities, chemical and biological weapons production facilities, and sites of extraction for uranium, silver, gold, and other mineral resources. As was the case with the idealized conceptions of Old Appalachia, the romanticized conception of what lie out the
New West privileges the scenic, natural west over ugly, developed, nuclear, and military west. For many individuals migrating or traveling Westward, however, "the East" was also an "abstraction or an invention that had no basis in personal experience or fact. Notions about what lay back east could just be as mythic and wide-ranging as people's perceptions of what existed out west." (Findlay 1992, p.271). Regardless of what they imagine the West (or East) to be, travelers are drawn by the mythical and popular cultural images of the West, individuals seek out a "real western identity" by contrasting their adopted region to what they believed they had left behind. They tap into the rugged individualism of the cowboy rustler and the imagery of wide-open spaces for retreat and serenity. However, when they arrive to the region, many are alarmed that the natural, beautiful West is also an urban, populated, and polluted West.

The development of the New West landscape has radically displaced and transformed pre-existing community forms, leaving residents and new transplants scrambling for a sense of place, community and regional identity. The realities of New West living have also driven up prices of "real" communities with a vibrant downtown and an active public sphere, a sense of history and a shared past, to the point where newcomers and native Westerners cannot afford to live in these places. In light of these trends, small, face-to-face community is believed to be vanishing into the pages of history. However, it exactly in these pages where participants in bluegrass festival life seek connections to a perceivably simpler time and place in American cultural memory.
As significant cultural symbols, participants active in reviving bluegrass music and culture in the New West sought to restore social relations “connected with past or disappearing ways of life” and reflected a reaction against the postmodern “movement from the solidarity of the village and the countryside to the individualism and anomie of the modern city.” (Lasch 1991, Simonson 1996, p.325). Fusing the mobility of modern life with the anchors of tradition, participants in the New West bluegrass festival scene created a time, a space, and a place where they could retreat, albeit temporarily, from the modern working world. By appropriating these mythological associations and incorporating them into the emergent culture of the New American West, participants evoked cultural memories of small town, Appalachian life and blended them with the imagery and rustic physical settings suggestive of the Old West.

Geographer Yi Fu Tuan (1977) points out that individuals seek out open and uninhabited space to flee the often stifling and oppressive crowding of densely populated urban areas. Despite the urge to escape the crowding of urban life and identify with space “as a common symbol of freedom,” individuals continue to long for or return back to these “enclosed and humanized” spaces for a sense of place (p. 51, 54). Just as residents of the crowded East and West Coasts indicated that they retreated to the intermountain West for a sense of space, they did so in a context that emphasized the importance of cultivating a sense of place. Explaining the fluctuating impulse of festivalgoers to escape these enclosed spaces of urban life by seeking open and free space in the American West, Tuan writes that “human life is a dialectical movement between shelter and venture,
attachment and freedom” (p.54). Though the quest for individualism and autonomy for New Westers is an enduring one, individuals feel the pull of identifying with a community and cultivating a sense of place.

As alternative to the self-reliance and individualism associated with the lone cowboy, the bluegrass festival experience provided the symbolism for community that often eludes the images, myths and stories of the Old West. Though one would expect that in a New West setting that residents and tourists would appropriate and celebrate the “lone, singing cowboy” sound of Gene Autry and Roy Acuff characteristic of early western music (see Peterson 1997), they abandon its rugged individualism for the rich symbolism of community found in bluegrass. With the exception of the Native American Powwow, the prairie wagon circle, or the frontier rendezvous, the Old West has few symbols of community life. Though some may point to the mining camp as another form of Old Western community, these mining camps were particularly harsh places to live and populated primarily by men (Johnson, 2000). Providing more of a community of survival than a community of intimate hearth and home, these symbols do not quite capture the interpersonal warmth captured in and through Old Appalachia as constructed in and through the bluegrass song.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, bluegrass music and culture have always-already constructed an idealized and often mythical portrayal of “Appalachia” to cope with forces of modernization, commercialization, and mass culture. In this way, the re-rival of bluegrass against the New West backdrop becomes a postmodern pastiche whose fragments of past and present cultures, regions,
traditions and histories are simultaneously interpreted and reinterpreted, and hermetically grafted to create a sutured but seamless whole. Their re-enactment confuses their origins and traditions in ways that create novel "traditional" forms and images of the past (Feintuch 1993), simulacra without a definitive historical referent (Baudrillard 1983). Characterized by their plasticity, participants re-creation and appropriation of these mythical images turn "myth into nature" (Barthes 1957, p.132) and thus cloud discernable distinctions between history and memory.

Regardless of their historical accuracy, the appropriation of these mythologies and memories constituted a vocabulary through which individuals articulated, coped with, and responded to forces affecting the New West landscape. Reflecting the tensions between tradition and (post)modernity, participants sought out bluegrass festival life as a symbolic escape from the hurly-burly of modern urban living and from a mass cultural world that they perceived as increasingly void of meaning and authenticity. Participants, in turn, performed this tension on the public stage of the festival and festival camp.

**A Welcome Home: Courting Community and Place in a Mobile World**

As mentioned in Chapter VI, participants in the New West bluegrass scene expressed a consistent longing for inclusive, intimate, and simple forms of *gemeinschaft* community that they felt eluded new suburban developments and gentrified rural towns, yet wanted the freedoms that their mobility afforded them. Terkenli (1995) argues that the rise of geographic mobility and the "legacies of
industrialization and urbanization that are the basis of modernization have resulted in the loss of physical community or region as home” (p. 332) and have disrupted the sense of community that existed in traditional places. Because of this increasing mobility, he argues “the social world of the neighborhood and village are now less important as transitional zones between home and nonhome settings” (p. 332). Though certainly correct in his assertion that these forces have irrevocably altered the face of home and community, Terkenli does not take seriously the impulse to seek out or construct forms of village life outside of a geographically rooted locale. Despite their incipient decline, people long for places that are rooted in history and steeped in tradition as a source of personal and regional identity. For participants in the bluegrass festival, they crafted these places in the portable festival camp.

The growth of these portable, village-like communities responds to what Sheldrake refers to as a “crisis of place” in Western societies. He argues that this crisis refers to an overwhelming “sense of rootlessness, dislocation or displacement…. At its root lies a decline in traditional systems of values and symbols.” (Sheldrake, 2001). Participants expressed feeling rootless, dislocated, and displaced by their mobility, but revived bluegrass music and culture to reclaim traditional values and symbols of community life. Growing from the often-contradictory impulses for mobility and community, participants crafted portable forms of community by drawing from the traditional value systems associated with small town, Appalachian life (namely simplicity, authenticity, intimacy, stability, family, and kinship). In his edited volume The Longing For
Leroy Rouner (1996), argues that as Americans in an increasingly mobile society:

we are nostalgic for the settled, secure life of small towns in the American heartland, where people once knew what they ought to do, and most of them did it. This is the soft, dreamy nostalgia of modern folk who have chosen mobility over stability in order to get ahead in life, and are saddened by the price they have to pay (p. 1).

Though presented in the scholarly literature as a Hobson’s Choice between mobility and community, members of New West bluegrass scene fuse their mobility with a longing for community in the intentional construction of the festival camp. They enjoy the relative freedoms of geographical mobility with the conscious cultivation of community that scholars feel they necessarily leave behind when traveling on the road.

Interestingly the English world *nostalgia* is rooted in the ancient Greek *nostos*, which translates as “return home” (Terkenli, 1995, 328). As demonstrated in Chapter V, the notion of “home” or “home away from home” becomes especially important when one is displaced from or can no longer return home. Many literary and poetic references to home have been written either by someone in exile or when a home is in danger of being lost or changed in unwanted ways (Wolf 1980). Whereas Appalachian mountain dwellers, the Diaspora, and refugee populations have been physically removed or exiled from their home of origin or identification, bluegrass fans describe that they are *culturally* and *socially* displaced through the forces of modernization.
Many participants in the New West bluegrass scene fled their community-starved, sprawling, suburban neighborhoods to find enriching, meaningful interaction in perceivably safe and open settings. As mentioned in the Introduction, these settings became for many participants a “welcome home.” While creating alternatives to mainstream social and cultural outlets, participants in bluegrass festival life couch their involvement in terms of what the setting is not: neither artificial nor exclusive; neither oppressive nor overly individualistic. Accordingly, these individuals increasingly leave home and seek environments which promote norms of equality, reciprocity, authenticity, and self-expression which their home neighborhoods often fail to provide. As Florida (2002) writes:

Where old social structures were once nurturing, they are now restricting. Communities that once attracted people now repel them. Our evolving communities and emerging society are marked by a greater diversity of friendships, more individualistic pursuits, and weaker ties within the community. People want diversity, low entry barriers, and the ability to be themselves... The people in my focus groups rarely wished for the kinds of connectedness (Robert) Putnam (2000) talks about. If anything they were trying to get away from these kinds of environments. Sure, they wanted community, but not to the extent that they were inhibited from living their own life and being themselves.

Individuals who participate in bluegrass festival life create portable forms of community that require neither the commitment nor the institutional demands characterizing traditional community participation. On one hand, participants
idealized small towns of old, but like Old Appalachia, selectively “pared” the elements they deemed undesirable. In the portable festival community, participants valued their autonomy over stifling communal demands, weak over strong ties, low over high entry barriers, and mobility over geographical stability.

The brand of mobile, portable, “plug and play” community found in bluegrass festival settings illustrates what Leslie Irvine (2000) terms the “institution lite.” Since many have turned away from the traditional capital “I” Institutions of family, religion, and community, these individuals search for novel ways of meeting the needs that these traditional social groups and relationships once met. These small “i” institutions, or institutions “lite,” offer individuals “all the benefits of an institution, but without all of the obligations” (p. 68). Because the New West bluegrass scene made few demands on participants outside the festival, they return home or move on to the next festival with relative freedom. Rather than merely replacing religion, family, and community, the festival setting provide spaces where participants can freely celebrate these traditional Institutions and experienced them without their associated burdens and boundaries.

Many would argue that a community defined by a lack of formal commitment or institutional involvement is hardly a community at all. To be sure, when communities are defined by their participants’ mobility and transience, involvement in local politics, neighborhood activities, and public service wane as people pick up and create forms of community outside of their geographic locales (see Putnam, 2000). Accordingly, some scholars would imply that the bluegrass
festival simply provides a sense of communion, a purely psychic entity, rather than true community, rooted in a commitment to social institutions and embracing a range of activities. As Selznick (1992, p. 364) argues, the “mass mobilization of detached individuals is not a paradigm of communal participation.” Members of the New West bluegrass scene indicate, however, that their home communities neither offer a diverse range of activities nor accommodate free and open access to key neighborhood institutions. Feeling isolated and disconnected in their local communities (Barber 1998), they look elsewhere.

Although lacking formal obligations or commitment, participants in these portable communities create stable and enduring social structures that resemble “true” neighborhoods in nearly every feature except geographical rootedness. Devoted members of the New West bluegrass scene faithfully attend festivals and arrange their work and vacation schedules to ensure consistent attendance from festival to festival, year to year. While they do not commit to the formal Institutions of traditional neighborhoods, they commit to organize their lives in order to attend and spend time with their mobile community of friends and “festival families.” These festival events are subjectively meaningful and extremely important events in their lives as evidenced by the great lengths to which participants often go to attend them. Rather than signifying a distinct place rooted in a stable, geographic locale, the members of this portable community experienced “community” as an emergent phenomenon. They engaged in sustained and repeated interaction and established stable yet situationally flexible practices from site to site. They entered a reliable social world of their own
making and encounter a familiar cast of personalities along the festival circuit. In
doing so, participants challenged traditional notions of geographically rooted
community and illustrated that “community” is defined and constructed in and
through sustained and recurring social interaction. Additionally, they
demonstrated that a rooted locale is not a necessary condition for community
participation (Correll 1995) or for place formation. By establishing consistent sets
of rituals and norms across the mobile festival circuit, participants cultivate the
vital ingredients for a stable, enduring community to flourish, one in which they
felt strong attachment and a sense of meaningful place.

In lieu of rootedness and life tied to locality, participants in festival
exercised their geographical mobility and converged in spaces within which they
expressed their attachments to “place as region.” (Terkenli 1995). In her
ethnography of the Australian “Top Half” festival, Michelle Duffey (2000)
explains how similarly mobile, geographically dispersed mountain travelers create
an emplaced identity in their treks through the highlands of Australia. Though
held at different places in the Top Half region, and though rotating the venue each
year, participants cultivated a community comprised of residents, tourists, and
transient adventure seekers all of whom shared identification as being a “Top
Halfer.” In the New West bluegrass scene, the festival similarly marks out one’s
identity as temporary resident of a particular town or traveler to the West, and
reaffirms participants’ membership in the larger, dispersed group of “New
Westers.” Reflecting a shift of identity in post-industrial societies from traditional,
familial, community, religious, and work structures to “lifestyle,” individuals
increasingly seek out spaces for lifestyle identity performance outside of these “Big I” Institutions (Bellah, et.al. 1985; Dickinson 1997; Giddens 1991; Irvine, 2000). Whereas questions of personal identity traditionally have revolved around work and career, the rise of geographical mobility and a “seeking” lifestyle (Adler and Adler) have anchored identity more fully in travel and tourism. With the rise of the creative economy, the question of identity no longer revolves around “what do you do?” but becomes “where are you from?” or “what do you do for leisure or recreation?” (see Florida, 2002).

As discussed in Chapter VIII, the pilgrimage to the festival site and the consumption of the festival experience became central in returning to a perceptively more authentic performance of self-identity. Individuals left their place of residence to pilgrimage to the often rural, isolated, and geographically enclosed festival site. In these spaces, they either returned to a more authentic performance of their “real self” or tried on altogether different identities that in some way highlighted portions of their self that was not readily expressed in daily life. Away from home, Terkenli (1995) argues, “human horizons expand, and an individual may discover new aspects of the self that result in an inevitable reordering of the intimate world and a reevaluation of past, present, and future situations.” To be sure, the festival does not determine one’s sense of self or self-identity but frames identity through the logic and structure of the festival. As Turner, Hetherington, and Pratt (Turner 1969; Hetherington 2000; Pratt 1990) argue, participants experience the liminality or “free space” within the festival site as a carnivalesque and transformative space (Bakhtin 1984) in which they explore
alternative identities and cultivate alternative community forms. In these spaces, societal norms, institutions, and categories collapse and coalesce into new forms that highlight the values of diversity, free expression, and autonomy frequently lacking in traditional community forms and not commonly associated with sites of public culture (Hetherington 2000).

As a form of transformative cultural politics, these particular “portable” community settings suggest that the interactional dynamics promoted by its members reflect a conscious cultivation of larger goals, values, and practices which they see in short supply in modern American society, namely place, community, and autonomous self identity. They tap into enduring discourses of anti-urbanism and anti-modernization in American culture, and cultivate their nostalgic negative: wilderness, village, and rurality (see Lofland 2000). It is in these nostalgic frameworks that mobile festivalgoers travel to rural festival parks to enact and perform alternatives to homogenized urban space, gated forms of community, and identity guided by “Big I” Institutions. Resisting the “identity robbing” trends of modernization, Klapp (1975) questions “whether new human symbols can be devised which will replace local sense of place.” I contend that the mobile festivalgoers in the New West bluegrass scene appropriate symbols of old to create forms of resistance to the problems of modern and postmodern society. Festivalgoers do not rest with the idea that their identities are subject to fragmentation, fractured or pupulated selfhood, or multiphreilia. Instead they retreat to the festival site to reclaim a stable sense of self rooted in place, community, tradition.
Festival Performance as Public Discourse

In *Experience and Nature*, John Dewey states that: “the first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art” (Dewey 1925 quoted in Duncan 1962, p.67). For Dewey, art is the primary vehicle through which cultural undercurrents are formulated, articulated, and expressed. As a musical art, bluegrass music provides a window into a rich tapestry of social sentiment- both reflecting the original social and cultural conditions facing the life-worlds of the early bluegrass musicians and fans, and the conditions facing musicians and fans today. Dewey elaborates,

“The level and style of the arts of literature, poetry, ceremony, amusement, and recreation which obtain in a community, furnishing the staple objects of enjoyment in that community, do more than all else to determine the current direction of ideas and endeavors in the community. They supply the meanings in terms of which life is judged, esteemed and criticized.” (Dewey, 1925)

As a vital, but often undervalued contributor to the ongoing dialogue of the public sphere, culture as a site of production and consumption provides a common language and vocabulary through which we interpret, understand and articulate our reactions to shared social concerns. As a stage for performance, culture is the venue through which responses to these concerns are played out and enacted for a public audience. By examining these sites of culture as they are situated in their local social contexts, scholars can read these texts, performances, and artifacts as
forms of vernacular dialogue—rhetorically shaped understandings of common
concerns that are expressed, interpreted, and evaluated at the level of everyday
interaction (see Hauser 1999).

Commenting on the role of festival in social life, Stoeltje (1992) argues
that its primary purpose is to bring individuals together and communicate
messages about the society in which they live and the role of the individual within
it. Because of this communicative role, "every effort either to change or to
constrain social life will be expressed in some specific relationship to the
festival." (p. 263). Through the various performances of place, community, and
identity at the bluegrass festival, participants expressed their sentiments about
their own relationship to the changing West. For participants of the New West
bluegrass scene, they couched their participation in the portable festival
community in terms of what the scene was not. By leaving their hometowns and
neighborhoods to participate in portable forms of community, they gain
perspective and come to value more what they seem to be losing (Terkenli,
1995, 331). As such, they described the festival in contrast to home spaces that
were often characterized by sprawling and crowded landscapes, communities that
were organized around the interests and values of a powerful few, and public
spaces their were either commodified, splintered, or privatized.

The responses of festival participants mirrors Kling's assertion that a
"fragmented, privatizing, service oriented urban polity" increasingly drives the
postmodern city and its public spaces. He argues that "the postmodern city tends
to neglect or dismantle the public spaces and public sensibilities that nurture the
formation of an extended collective consciousness” and therefore “the reconstruction of any sort of mutually supportive, redistributive politics must look to the building of new public forms” (Kling 1993, p. 45). Though channeled into the private spaces of the festival camp, participants expressed that their cities and towns do not allow adequate public space for free and open expression of personal identity. Instead, they find them increasingly co-opted by corporate interests and populated by mass cultural offerings. Henri Lefebvre (1991) organizes the control of public space into two broad camps: those who dominate and control space, such as “business and state, institutions, the family... corporate and constituted bodies of all kinds” and “forces that seek to appropriate space,” namely “various forms of self-management or workers’ control or territorial and industrial entities, communities and communes, elite groups striving to change life and transcend political institutions and parties.” Thanks to the potential energies of the latter group “capable of diverting homogenized space to their own purposes, a theatricalized or dramatized space is likely to arise.” (Lefebvre in Kling 1993, p. 36). On the dramatized stage of the festival camp, festivalgoers transformed campground spaces in ways that allowed for freer forms of self expressions, more intimate and inclusive forms of community, and more meaningful attachments to and relationships with place than they found in the “postmodern city.” Despite the fact that these transformations arose within the private space of the festival site, participants reconfigured these spaces in ways that reflect a longing for autonomy, authenticity, and community control of the public realm. Though exercised outside of truly public spaces, it is important to
read and interpret the voices of the new West bluegrass scene to better understand why they fled their home cities and towns in search for portable forms of community and a more meaningful sense of place.

It is important for scholars of the public sphere to realize that people often form informal publics and voice their concerns in a vernacular public sphere outside of official public channels of communication and feedback. Reading the bluegrass festival as a vital form of public dialogue, I conclude with a few brief contributions that these sentiments performed by festival participants offer a broader public.

**Hope for Community**

The sentiments of community decline and loss of place voiced by festivalgoers are important for community and urban planners who must consider how people relate to and create meaning from a particular place. Why are members of local communities leaving their home neighborhoods behind to create mobile forms of community? What are the perceived ills of modern community life and neighborhood architecture? What changes can policymakers and planners implement to imbue our cityscapes and landscapes with a greater sense of place? In what ways can our public spaces be organized to be more inclusive of its community members? How can our public spaces and public spheres be managed to allow more authentic and autonomous forms of public self-expression? The sentiments couched in the growing bluegrass festival movement highlights what is perceived to be wrong with our existing housing developments and city designs.
Many expressed a desire to have open, inclusive public spaces in which they could gather with a diversity of other individuals and interact with others in ways that are more reflective of their "true" selves and identities.

These insights are extremely useful for city managers and community development departments who work to design and distribute public spaces for a larger constituency of citizens. The responses of festivalgoers also indicate that these spaces must involve community in their design and must involve citizens intimately in the planning of its events, traditions, rituals, and celebrations. The sentiments expressed by bluegrass festivalgoers also demonstrate the importance of place in the crafting of a viable community. Festivalgoers explained that an important component in constructing a sense of place is the opportunity to have a legitimate voice in the shape that their communities take. They expressed a deep desire to be intimately connected to the rituals, traditions, and practices that define the community and its members. Additionally the mobile and transient setting of the bluegrass festival as a site of placebuilding can provide interesting comparisons to other forms of portable community. The processes through which bluegrass communities emerged could shed light on the processes through which gypsy communities, refugee camps, or other mobile forms of Diaspora become emplaced. Far away from home, it may be useful for those interested in cultivating meaningful, temporary places of shelter and belonging for displaced populations to better understand the elements that transform temporary spaces into meaningful places.
Finally, the resuscitation of memories of the past can provide clues into the alternative worlds that members of a collectivity seek to create or perhaps maintain in light of cultural change. Viewing cultural performance as cultural memory, scholars can tap into the vast storehouse of images, stories, myths, and histories circulating in and through cultural texts and performance to achieve a more thorough understand how individuals use and appropriate memories of the past to cope with contemporary issues and problems. Memory can serve certain social needs of a particular individual or group because, according to Maurice Halbwachs (1925), it:

gives us the illusion of living in groups which do not imprison us... If certain memories are inconvenient or burden us, we can always oppose to them the sense of reality inseparable from our present life... not only can we roam freely within these groups, going from one to another, but within each of them –even when we have decided to linger with them in thought- we will not encounter this feeling of human constraint in the same degree that we so strongly experience today (p.50).

By creating cultural memories that assist in dealing with a particular set of constraints or problems, collectivities can use the past to better cope with and understand their present situations. By reading cultural production, consumption, and performance as a site of politicized discourse, spectators of both politics and popular culture may begin to read films such as O’ Brother Where Art Thou and other cultural revivals as more than “merely” popular culture, instead tapping into
the pulses of daily life that help to organize both our worlds and our responses to them.


