



Mountains, Monuments, and other Matter: Environmental Affects at Manzanar

Jennifer K. Ladino

Department of English, University of Idaho, USA

ABSTRACT This essay investigates the natural landscapes and built structures at the Manzanar National Historic Site, the first of ten incarceration camps to open in 1941 and a temporary home for over 11,000 Japanese Americans. Using former incarcerated Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's writing as a touchstone, my essay foregrounds the environmental features of the (re)location: the extreme desert weather, the mountain vistas, the incarcerated-created rock gardens, the reconstructed barracks, guard tower, and barbed wire fence, and the cemetery/monument. I bring together concepts from ecocriticism and from affect theory—particularly Ben Anderson's "affective atmospheres," Sianne Ngai's "tone," and Sara Ahmed's characterization of affect as "sticky"—and develop the notion of *affective agency* to describe the impacts generated by environments and objects at this national memory site. I assess how the visual and written rhetoric at the site addresses what I call an implied tourist, and I show how powerful emotions of shame, anger, grief, and compassion—and sometimes, mixed, even contradictory, affects—are not only represented in visual and written rhetoric but are also, in a sense, communicated by the environment itself. More broadly, I suggest that ecocritical theory brings a useful lens to discussions of public memory, and that affect theory helps account for the less tangible, visceral, experiences visitors have at Manzanar and other fraught historical sites, as well as within our everyday environments.

When seven-year-old Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston arrived at the Manzanar incarceration camp¹ after riding all day on a Greyhound bus with drawn shades, the first thing she saw was

a yellow swirl across a blurred, reddish setting sun. The bus was being pelted by what sounded like splattering rain. It wasn't rain. This was [her] first look at something [she]

¹ While the camps are usually called "internment camps," the word "internment" is legally and ethically problematic. In the legal sense, internment technically applies to the imprisonment of non-citizens in the Department of Justice internment centers. Over two-thirds of the Japanese at Manzanar were citizens. Densho.org, a website that preserves testimonies of incarcerated and compiles historical information, suggests internment is a euphemism and prefers incarceration. Some suggest "concentration camp" is most accurate, a point to which I return. With respect for these ongoing debates, I use "incarceration camps" and "incarcerated" to affirm the reality of imprisonment. Thanks to Manzanar ranger-historian Dr. Patricia Biggs for her insights about terminology.

would soon know very well, a billowing flurry of dust and sand churned up by the wind through Owens Valley.²

Houston describes her first impression of the arid valley that would be her home for the next three-and-a-half years as a “swirl” that is both environmental and emotional. She continues to bring together environment and affect throughout her memoir, *Farewell to Manzanar*, the best-known account of life at this first of ten camps—a site where over 11,000 Japanese Americans were imprisoned, beginning in March of 1942.³ *Farewell to Manzanar*’s frank, observant young narrator recounts the homesickness, humiliation, and racism, as well as the cultural, economic, and personal losses experienced by those incarcerated. Houston also describes how the incarcerated formed communities and reshaped their environment—a remote 640-acre plot of desert in the shadow of California’s Sierra Nevada, crammed with 504 barracks, 72 latrines, 36 mess halls, 36 recreation halls, 36 laundry buildings, and 36 ironing rooms and enclosed by barbed wire—into something more inhabitable, even more beautiful.

In 1992, 50 years after Manzanar opened, the National Park Service (NPS) began managing Manzanar as a National Historic Site. NPS officials worked closely with former incarcerated to design an interpretive center that would accurately represent life in the camp. As Chief of Interpretation Alisa Lynch explained to me, one of the NPS managers’ goals is to make visitors “feel the era,” to facilitate a physical and emotional sense of the camp experience that is historically authentic.⁴ To this end, the interpretive center, which is located in the camp’s original auditorium building, collects diverse artifacts: a home plate from the baseball field, a Kendo helmet and gloves, and children’s marbles, along with news clippings, ID tags, and other everyday objects from the period. Vintage photos, film footage, and audio recordings recreate the era. The result is more museum than visitor center; education, not recreation, is the priority.

Resonating with Houston’s final book chapter title, “Ten Thousand Stories,” one particularly tall and bright NPS display panel reads “One Camp, Ten Thousand Lives; One Camp, Ten Thousand Stories.” Since, as Houston observes, incarceration relied on homogenizing and dehumanizing people—“You cannot deport 110,000 people unless you have stopped seeing individuals”⁵—making these stories public is an ethical, political act of recovery, a way of re-humanizing the individuals involved. Many stories are being unearthed today by archaeologists and historians on-site, and others gathered in archives such as *densho.org*. These memoirs, photographic essays, and interviews are intimately connected to the natural and built environment of the place. My essay foregrounds the environmental features of the relocation experience—the extreme desert weather, the mountain vistas, the rock gardens, the cemetery, and the reconstructed barracks, guard towers, and barbed wire—in order to enhance existing accounts of Manzanar with a perspective that accentuates the

² Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (New York: Ember, 2012), 18-19.

³ The Manzanar site bulletin states that “11,070 Japanese Americans were processed through Manzanar,” and that the population peaked at 10,046 in September of 1942. National Park Service, *Manzanar*, 2003.

⁴ Alisa Lynch (Chief of Interpretation), in discussion with the author, 1 June, 2014.

⁵ Houston, *Farewell*, 159. 110,000 refers to the total number of people incarcerated in all ten camps.

impacts of the natural and built environments at this complex site. I engage several of the available oral histories, but mostly I use *Farewell to Manzanar* and Houston's recent essay "Crossing Boundaries"⁶ to frame my essay. Not only did her work directly influence my encounter with the site, but it also describes more keenly than any other accounts I've found the affective impacts of physical matter at Manzanar.

A complex "archive of public affect"⁷ situated in the ideologically overdetermined American West, Manzanar is ideally suited for analysis of how problematic histories are negotiated publicly and in relation to multiple scales of identity, including personal, cultural, and national. Like the NPS, I am invested in the "feel" of this fraught historical site. For me, this means asking how it functions today, for visitors, at several affective registers: the *textual*, as represented emotion; the *corporeal*, as affect and/or emotion felt in my own body; and the *environmental*, as affect emanating from landscapes, built structures, and objects on-site. I investigate these registers by using insights from material ecocriticism: an approach that "takes matter as a text, as a site of narrativity."⁸ Material ecocritics understand matter in an unconventional way. More than raw material for human use, matter—the food we ingest, the soil in which we grow food, the natural and human-made structures we see, smell, and touch—has agency in the form of profound impacts on the world and its occupants. Agency, in this humbling redefinition, is not a product of individual consciousness or will but rather a collaboration between human and nonhuman actors.

This conception of agency enhances scholarship on public memory by helping to theorize the impacts of the extra-textual, of physical matter, in the eco-affective "swirl" at a place like Manzanar. So far, ecocritics have focused on *narrative agency*⁹ and shortchanged other ways that matter affects us. I would like to turn our attention to *affective agency*, understood as matter's capacity to impact other bodies viscerally, even while remaining recalcitrant. Believing, with Jane Bennett, that matter is "vibrant" and, with Erika Doss, that affect is "embodied in ... material form,"¹⁰ I'm curious to know: How does matter generate affect, and what kinds of mixed, conflicting, or "*noncathartic*"¹¹ emotions are promoted at this memorial site? How does affect accumulate here—how is it embedded in landscapes, buildings, and stories on NPS displays? How do objects—flowers, rocks, origami cranes, broken glass, handwritten letters, and artifacts from the 1940s—that reside, circulate, or are left at this site, affect visitors? How do the natural landscapes and built structures at Manzanar facilitate emotions about incarceration, and so shape attitudes about nationalism, war, and racism, in the U.S.?

⁶ Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, "Crossing Boundaries," in *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*, ed. Alison H. Deming and Lauret E. Savoy (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2011).

⁷ Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 13.

⁸ Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19, no. 3, Summer (2012): 451.

⁹ Iovino and Oppermann define material ecocriticism as "[d]ealing with the narrative dimension of ... agential emergences"—the way matter is "at once material, semiotic, and discursive," 451.

¹⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 23-24. Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 13.

¹¹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

These are complicated questions, since none of the categories at stake in them—landscape, object, public memory,¹² or, especially, affect—is either physically or intellectually stable. I distinguish *affect*, which (for many theorists) precedes or eludes cognition and discourse, and can transcend the individual body, from *emotion*, a more personal, subjective experience.¹³ I treat emotions as consciously interpreted or narrated affects—“feelings that have found the right match in words.”¹⁴ Affect is a slippery and often nebulous term. Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart’s extraordinary book *Ordinary Affects* doesn’t exactly define affect, but it does provide a methodological model for tracing affective “intensities” in the world—intensities that are “more fractious, multiplicitous, and unpredictable than symbolic meanings.”¹⁵ Geographer Ben Anderson also uses the word “intensities” in his account of affect as “the transpersonal or prepersonal intensities that emerge as bodies affect one another.”¹⁶ Informed by these theorists, I find that writing about such intensities requires a definition of affect as an “impression”¹⁷ that is less explicitly cognitive than emotion—in Teresa Brennan’s words, a “physiological shift accompanying a judgment.”¹⁸

Of course, affect and emotion are dynamic; they can even become one another. As Sianne Ngai explains, “affects [can] acquire the semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions [can] conversely denature into affects.”¹⁹ This transmutability hinges on “narrative,” itself a contested term. Since I want to emphasize its rhetorical dimensions, I draw on James Phelan’s relatively narrow definition of narrative as “somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened.”²⁰

¹² I will clarify these terms in the course of the essay. To start, I am informed by Edward S. Casey’s understanding of “public memory” as memory that occurs “out in the open ... where discussion with others is possible ... but also where one is exposed and vulnerable.” For me, as for Casey, “platial parameters” are “central, if not primary” to this reassessment. “Public Memory in Place and Time,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 25, 41.

¹³ Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings* offers a useful overview of the distinction between the two terms. See 25-28.

¹⁴ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5.

¹⁵ Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁶ Ben Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009): 78. Informed by Brian Massumi, Gilles Deleuze, and others, Anderson argues that the concept of atmosphere “unsettles” the emotion-affect distinction (80).

¹⁷ I like the word “impression” for reasons similar to Sara Ahmed’s—among them, its connotations of both thought and emotion help avoid reinforcing a mind-body split when thinking about affect. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6.

¹⁸ Brennan, *Transmission*, 5. “Judgment” here is not explicitly cognitive; rather, affect itself is a kind of corporeal judgment, a physiological response to one’s environment and/or its inhabitants.

¹⁹ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 27.

²⁰ James Phelan, “Rhetoric/Ethics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* 14 (2007), 203. Erin James recognizes the complexity of the word “narrative” in her glossary entry: “Traditionally, the representation of a story consisting of an event or a sequence of events, fictional or otherwise. Narrative is a notoriously difficult word to define ...” She references scholars for whom narratives are “defined by the presence of one or more narrators speaking to one or more narratees”; others, for whom “narrative can be distinguished from description by the representation of a sequence of events, as opposed to one event”; and still others, for whom “experientiality is the defining component of

Whether focused and highly personal stories—like the individual testimonies inside Manzanar’s interpretive center—or large-scale, cultural stories, like discourse about the American West as a frontier, narratives function rhetorically, often ideologically, to give meaning to our experiences. Affect and narrative operate in tandem—and sometimes, as I will show, in tension. Although it may seem hard to imagine an experience at a public memorial that escapes narration, I contend that we often do *not* convert bodily sensations into emotions by giving our feelings “narrative complexity.” Unlike Ngai, who sees emotion and affect as different only in degree and not in kind, I retain the possibility of a qualitative difference so as to account for how affect can exceed, precede, or temporarily elude, the narratives that structure our lives.

Exactly *how* affecting occurs is hard to say, especially when the bodies in question are nonhuman or inanimate. Transmission, for Brennan, is a kind of emotional contagion “that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect”—a process dependent on “an interaction with other people and an environment.”²¹ Like Sara Ahmed, I see limitations to this kind of “outside-in” model of affect transmission: it ignores the “moodiness” of the embodied subject and risks “transforming emotion into a property, as something that one has, and can then pass on, as if what passes on is the same thing.”²² I am not an environmental determinist: the environment, for me, is not the sole agent of affective transference. Rather, affect transmission happens in a kind of “world making,”²³ a fluid process in which objects become “sticky,” or “saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension.”²⁴ Manzanar itself is an object in these terms—saturated and intense—even as it contains a myriad of “sticky” objects that transmit affect as they circulate at the site and, later, in visitors’ memories.

Manzanar can also be said to have multiple “affective atmospheres,” a phrase Anderson invokes and I use here to describe “singular affective qualities that emanate from but exceed the assembling of bodies.”²⁵ Brennan wonders: “Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere?’”²⁶ But what does it mean to “feel the atmosphere” not just *in* a place but *of* a place? This is a crucial question as I move to examine the environmental factors involved in the transmission of affect. I read the landscapes and the built structures at Manzanar by assessing what Ngai calls “tone”: a “literary or cultural artifact’s ... global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world.”²⁷ Whereas an affective atmosphere is generated by an assemblage,²⁸

narrative.” Erin James, *The Storyworld Accord* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming 2015).

²¹ Brennan, *Transmission*, 3. Brennan focuses on people, even as she opens the door for an ecocritical investigation. Her work resonates with material ecocriticism in its critique of the human tendency to dismiss matter and objects as lacking “free will” and therefore non-agential (93).

²² Ahmed also makes the case that the “inside-out” model of emotional transference, in which emotions are inherent to individuals, is flawed for different reasons: it ignores the sociality of emotions (and so risks essentialism). *Cultural Politics*, 10.

²³ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁵ Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres,” 77.

²⁶ Brennan, *Transmission*, 1.

²⁷ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 28.

tone is more particular: “the dialectic of objective and subjective feeling that our aesthetic encounters inevitably produce.”²⁹ Of course, if tone is an “affective relay” between self and object,³⁰ there is always an environment in which this relay takes place—an environment that is affective in its own right. I foreground the natural and built environments as affective agents at Manzanar, and I read tone as one feature of perpetually emergent affective atmospheres.

Since my own “moodiness” adds to these atmospheres, writing about my personal responses to Manzanar is a methodological necessity. But I also think about how the site constructs what I call an “implied tourist.” Like Wayne Booth’s implied reader, the “bearer of the codes and norms presumed in [a text’s] readership,”³¹ the implied tourist is the visitor to whom memorials and their managers direct their rhetoric. Manzanar’s implied tourist is, among other things, educated (or knowledge-seeking) though perhaps not well-informed about the history of the camps, politically liberal, English speaking, and *not* a descendant of an incarcerated—criteria I happen to fit. Of course, an actual tourist can interact with the site in all kinds of ways that deviate from the ideal, or “authentic,”³² NPS-constructed experience. I cannot possibly account for all of these ways, but I speculate about how cultural associations—American, Western, and Japanese American—direct the affects that circulate at the site. Manzanar is surely a “site of shame”³³ that troubles American nationalism. But shame is only one emotion that “sticks” at the site, and a closer look at its environments and objects reveals more nuance to this affective archive.

When I arrive at Manzanar in June of 2014, the first thing that strikes me is a guard tower, its large searchlight pointed right at the entrance road (see Figure 1). Even without armed gunmen, the imposing tower carries cultural associations of war, machine guns, and Nazi concentration camps. With its incongruous linear symmetry, its tone is threatening and cold. It feels unnatural against the textured Owens Valley landscapes: the Alabama Hills—odd rock formations, reminding me of seaside drip castles I made as a child and carrying connotations of Southern pride and Western film history; the familiar tufts of pastel green against the rust-brown ground

²⁸ I use this term in the Deleuzian sense, described by Bennett as “living, throbbing confederations” of “diverse elements, vibrant materials of all sorts,” that are “not governed by any central head,” yet still have agency.

²⁹ Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

³¹ This definition comes from the Interdisciplinary Center for Narratology’s online “Living Handbook of Narratology” (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press), accessed 8 January, 2015, http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Implied_Reader.

³² I am alluding to the “authenticity of affect” that a memory site expects of tourists, implicitly and sometimes explicitly. See Blair, Carole, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 34.

³³ Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 302. The densho.org site uses the same phrase to describe the camps.

of the sagebrush flats; and the dominant Sierra Nevada, where snowfields dot Mt. Williamson, and other “majestic”³⁴ pinnacles tower thousands of feet above the valley.



Figure 1. Courtesy of National Park Service.

I am relieved not to be greeted by “a billowing flurry of dust and sand” like Houston was, although even this early-summer day is threatening to be a hot one. The Owens Valley is arguably a beautiful place, if not an especially comfortable one. Like Houston, many incarcerated recall the agency of the weather in the form of extreme temperatures—the valley reaches temperatures of over 100 degrees in summer and drops below freezing in winter—and the persistent wind that swept sand into bunkhouses, mess halls, and bodily crevices.³⁵ The valley’s history is as hostile as its environment. Los Angeles began acquiring water rights to the Owens Valley in 1905 and has since siphoned its water, draining Owens Lake, creating epic dust pollution, and displacing the farmers and ranchers who were making a living there. But these were only the most recently displaced people. The region was originally home to Paiutes, who were forcibly displaced when prospectors and miners, then ranchers, farmers, and orchardists—who’d come to seek their “fortunes in apples”³⁶—settled the area. By 1930, all these settlers had sold their water rights to L.A. and left the valley, their livelihood evaporated with the water. This is a classic Western story: indigenous people pushed out by white settlers,

³⁴ I cite Houston here (“Crossing,” 35), but this is a common way to describe large mountains.

³⁵ Comfort was not a criterion for the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in choosing locations for the camps, though remoteness and proximity to water were. The WRA thought Manzanar could draw on Shepherd Creek, to the north, for its water. When that water quickly proved inadequate for the camp’s needs, L.A. contractors funded the construction of an 800,000-gallon reservoir. The incarcerated labor crew that helped build the reservoir carved political graffiti in the wet concrete, including “pro-Japanese and anti-American sentiments” that are captured in the concrete to this day. NPS, *Manzanar Reservoir*, 2009.

³⁶ The quotation is a marketing slogan used by developer George Chaffey and his Owens Valley Improvement Company to recruit apple growers to the town of Manzanar. NPS, *Shepherd Ranch*, 2009.

an effort to turn a frontier into a garden, a political battle over water rights, an urban center sucking resources from small towns. Today, the valley's recreational draw obscures its history of displacement, much the way the dozens of Western films shot in the Alabama Hills—and the celebration of these films in the nearby town of Lone Pine—gloss the troubling conflicts of the “Old West.”

The Owens Valley feels vast and cinematic enough to accommodate all of these histories. It is a liminal place between the lowest and highest points in the contiguous United States: Death Valley's Badwater Basin (-282 ft.) and Mount Whitney (14,500 ft.). Mount Whitney isn't visible from Manzanar, though I'd spotted it the previous evening when I drove from Las Vegas through Death Valley to Lone Pine, the “small tree-filled town where a lot of mountain buffs turn off for the Mount Whitney Portal.”³⁷ A 13-year NPS seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park and longtime “mountain buff” myself, I feel the peaks beckoning with the promise of visual and bodily rewards, dramatic views, heightened senses, and access to water. On this trip, though, I am here to interpret the mountains, not to play in them. A scholar-visitor embarking on a grant-funded research project, and with no familial connection to the incarceration experience, I am hyperaware of my outsider status. I feel like an “affect alien,”³⁸ bringing an inappropriate love for big mountains to this site of shame. And yet, my personal associations of mountains with freedom, mobility, and the opportunity to reach a summit are not unique. They are also cultural, shared by many other white, economically secure, able-bodied Americans and promoted by dominant versions of Western history. Perhaps I am not an affect alien after all, but an embodiment of the implied tourist, the very demographic addressed by the site. One thing is clear: these associations with mountains are in tension with the barbed wire enclosing this memorial. I would soon discover other similar ironies conveyed by the environment itself.

Arriving by vehicle, as most of Manzanar's 85,000 annual visitors do, I drive through two restored sentry posts—like the guard tower, physical reminders that this was a prison—before pulling into the main parking lot. When I get out and close the car door, the sharp sound reverberates for miles. As I crunch across gravel and approach the interpretive center, a light breeze carries the warm smell of sagebrush. A sleek raven caws as it glides overhead. This is a quiet place, with an atmosphere of “loneliness and vulnerability”³⁹ characteristic of small Western towns. It is hard to imagine thousands of people fenced inside. I gather my impressions and walk slowly toward the interpretive center, unlocking my gaze from the mountains long enough to notice an object in my path: a three-and-a-half-foot tall conglomerate stone holding the California Registered Historical Landmark plaque (see Figure 2). If we haven't yet let ourselves think the phrase “concentration camp,” there it is, unapologetically, on the plaque, along with language naming “hysteria, racism and economic

³⁷ Houston, *Farewell*, 188.

³⁸ I am broadening Ahmed's phrase here. She uses it to describe people who are “alienated from the affective promise of happy objects” and so help expose political inequities. Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 50.

³⁹ Wallace Stegner, “Living Dry,” in *Where The Bluebird Sings To The Lemonade Springs* (New York: Random House, 1992), 74.

exploitation” as causes of incarceration. Bullet holes and hatchet marks on the plaque’s surface attest to the local community’s own hysteria and racism as well as the perpetual threat of violence embodied by the guard towers.⁴⁰ The tone of this marker sets the tone for the site: the rough conglomerate and scarred plaque match the harsh, confrontational narrative. The many visitors who stop to read the plaque⁴¹ have been fairly warned: this is a place where terrible things happened. The plaque sets us up for one of the NPS’s primary goals—“getting most visitors to the exhibition to feel compassion and sympathy for the incarcerated.”⁴²

Guilt, shame, and anger are also appropriate responses here. As Martha Nussbaum explains, guilt acknowledges a wrong that can be righted with reparations, whereas shame recognizes a flawed trait in oneself, a “falling short of some desired ideal.”⁴³ Some incarcerated express shame about their Manzanar experience in these terms. Houston describes feeling shame as a “continuous unnamed ache,” a determination to endure racism because “something about [her] deserved it.”⁴⁴ In the words of former incarcerated, activist, and founder of the Manzanar Committee Sue Kunitomi Embrey, many incarcerated “buried depressing camp memories because there was a feeling of shame, that they had done something wrong.”⁴⁵ Although Nussbaum lists shame as one of “compassion’s enemies”—in part because it can be divisive⁴⁶—I suspect shame is actually a more useful emotion for engaging American racism than guilt, which implies that reparations are an adequate fix. Shame is a strong possibility for visitors to Manzanar who recognize “hysteria, racism and economic exploitation” as ongoing problems and are willing to see themselves as implicated in them. Manzanar has the potential to be a very particular “site of shame,” then: one that might alleviate the shame of one group (the incarcerated’s shame at being racism’s objects) and transfer shame—about the enduring reality of racism in the U.S.—to visitors who aren’t in that group.

⁴⁰ Alisa Lynch explains that vandalism has been a problem at the landmark and at the cemetery, even as recently as 2001, when she began work at Manzanar. Lynch, in discussion with the author, 1 June, 2014. The controversy over the phrase “concentration camp” and the resistance, even anger, of local Owens Valley residents when asked to acknowledge this history, are described in Diana Meyers Bahr’s oral history of former incarcerated Sue Kunitomi Embrey. Notably, some high-profile officials, including then-Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes and then-Vice President Harry Truman, used “concentration camps” in public statements. Diana Meyers Bahr, *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123-133.

⁴¹ Initially located by the restored sentry posts to the south, the historical landmark plaque was relocated to this prominent spot in February of 2014 in order to be more visible to visitors.

⁴² “Manzanar Front End Evaluation Focus Group Results,” prepared for the NPS by Harris H. Shettel Evaluation, February 2001.

⁴³ Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁴⁴ Houston, *Farewell*, 188.

⁴⁵ Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 115.

⁴⁶ Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 359-364.



Figure 2. Photograph by author.

Here and throughout Manzanar, the implied tourist is a politically liberal, open-minded, visitor: amenable to a critique of racism, not averse to feeling guilt about what happened here, and perhaps even open to the shame of implication. She, or he, also needs educating, and so is probably an outsider to the incarceration experience. Most visitors seek that education in the interpretive center, where rangers are doing incredible work honoring the diverse stories of the incarcerated. This center, with its carefully curated artifacts, provocative visual and written exhibits, and compelling film, *Remembering Manzanar*, deserves a study of its own, something on par with Carole Blair and Neil Michel's rhetorical analysis of Mount Rushmore or Adam Gopnik's review of the 9/11 Memorial.⁴⁷ But my focus on landscape and built structures means I will stay outside, where the rebuilt barracks, excavated rock gardens, and cemetery monument exert affective agency in ways that are sometimes ironic, sometimes harmonious, but always profound. Rather than upholding national narratives of progress and democracy, Manzanar "admit[s] the complications, contradictions, and obligations of American national identity" and "reckon[s] with the nation's ghosts."⁴⁸ In what follows, I track how this reckoning happens at affective registers—textual, corporeal, and especially, environmental—and how contradictions are embedded in Manzanar's physical environment.

⁴⁷ Carole Blair, "The Rushmore Effect: Ethos and National Collective Identity," in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, ed. Michael J. Hyde (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 156-196. Adam Gopnik, "Stones and Bones," *The New Yorker* 7 & 14 (2014): 38-44.

⁴⁸ Doss, *Memorial Mania*, 303.

Visitors like me, who were raised on Western icons including John Ford Westerns and the Grand Canyon, are conditioned to see the Owens Valley as a kind of narrative agent, sending “messages that seem as true and incontrovertible as the mountains and plains.”⁴⁹ As Jane Tompkins describes in her classic *West of Everything*, the Western landscape is a place of “power, endurance [and] rugged majesty,” and the desert is “a hard place to be,” a place where you’ll find “no shelter, no water, no rest, no comfort.”⁵⁰ Incarcerees recount similar stories of hardship; they had some basic comforts—shelter, water—but lacked others, like privacy. Despite the close quarters, many families grew apart. Most poignantly, a few parents mourned the death of a child who had volunteered to fight for the same government that had imprisoned their family. These individual stories are narratives in a strict sense; they appear throughout the interpretive center and on the outdoor displays. Mountains, however, do not write the “messages” they send, even if our impressions of them are culturally inflected. While taking seriously the material ecocritical move that “broadens and enhances the narrative potentialities of reality in terms of an intrinsic performativity of elements,”⁵¹ I nevertheless contend that much of matter’s agency, its “intrinsic performativity,” is affective and not, strictly speaking, narrative. I will turn now toward the affective agency of the mountains and other environmental features of Manzanar, in the hopes of clarifying how affect works sometimes alongside narrative and sometimes in place of it, as an intense corporeal response to environmental features—something felt but not always storied.

Incarcerees lived in an environment that was both circumscribed and ironic—a “community built on contradictions.”⁵² Perhaps the biggest irony of Manzanar, as Karin Higa and Tim B. Wride note, was the “irony that their ‘all-American’ experience [was] taking place in confinement.”⁵³ The fact that incarcerees worked jobs, founded churches, held dances, went to school, published a newspaper (the ironically named *Manzanar Free Press*), and played sports—all while behind barbed wire—must have given an ironic tinge to daily life. When incarcerees danced to the Andrews Sisters’ popular song “Don’t Fence Me In” on Saturday nights, they must have felt the irony.

Irony tends to be associated with consciously recognized incongruities, a tension between what is said and what is unsaid, a cognitive contradiction of some kind. But Linda Hutcheon has long observed “both intellectual and affective” powers of irony. Irony “‘happens’ for you (or better, you *make* it ‘happen’) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together.”⁵⁴ There is no reason these meanings can’t be conveyed through affect rather

⁴⁹ Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

⁵¹ Iovino and Oppermann, “Material Ecocriticism,” 459.

⁵² Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 61-69.

⁵³ Karen Higa and Tim B. Wride, “Manzanar Inside and Out: Photo Documentation of the Japanese Wartime Incarceration,” in *Reading California: Art, Image, Identity, 1900-2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, Ilene Susan Fort (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 330.

⁵⁴ Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,” in *Methods For The Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, ed. Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estor (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 199. Hutcheon claims “there is little irony in most memorials” (206), and she is right if you think of their design and

than, or prior to, being conveyed through narrative. More recently, Nicole Seymour has made a case for irony as an affective mode “defined by incongruity” and potentially “alarmist.”⁵⁵ It makes sense to use the term to describe a conflicted, incongruous, affective reaction to a place—an affective dissonance that sounds visceral alarm bells. Irony need not necessarily be humorous, however; nor is it necessarily “unserious.”⁵⁶ The affective dissonance I’m calling irony can gel into an intense negative emotion, like anger, as easily as it can release into laughter. Or it can remain a kind of unsettling tension that simmers for a long time.

Ironies abound at the contemporary site. I stop at the old baseball fields to read a display with the lighthearted title “Play Ball!,” which claims this “symbol of an American way of life ... boosted morale” in camp. As I am imagining the cheering, smiling players on this field (with the help of the historic photo on the display) I glance up and see the reconstructed guard tower lurking just to the east. This quintessential American sport, with its connotations of democracy and freedom, was played in the shadow of armed guards—guards with guns pointed inside the camp. Part of this irony is generated by the narrative, the facile suggestion that a sport could “boost morale” in a prison setting. But one also *feels* the irony, in a more bodily sense, since the environment is at odds with the nationalistic text on the display. The “morale”-building field juxtaposed with the fear-inducing tower makes a paradoxical, ironic, affective impression—a corporeal impression that comes from being in this fraught environment.

Complicating things further, 180 degrees opposite the guard tower are the mountains, which either loom or beckon, depending on a visitor’s cultural associations. For me, their promise of adventure, exploration, and mobility generates more affective dissonance, as Mount Williamson’s alluring affect confronts the guard tower’s threatening one. But for some incarcerated—*and I imagine, for their descendants who visit today*—the landscape’s tone is as ominous and daunting as the tower’s. The mountain range echoes and compounds the confinement of the built environment, adding a “natural” reinforcement to the government-sponsored perimeter.⁵⁷ Houston writes about a night outside the fence for a school-sponsored camping trip, after which she concludes: “Lovely as they were to look at, the Sierras were frightening to think about, an icy barricade.”⁵⁸ Quite unlike the sense of adventure or risk that today’s recreationalists seek in the mountains, she felt more secure inside the barbed wire. For incarcerated, who could be shot for leaving the camp, this was not the open desert of the Western film, in which the leading male “can go in any direction, as far as he can go.”⁵⁹ Even so, today’s implied tourist is likely to sense vastness in the landscape—if not in the mountains,

intended impact. But accounting for how matter itself can contribute an unanticipated “critical edge” to the atmosphere in question suggests otherwise.

⁵⁵ Nicole Seymour, “Irony and Contemporary Ecocinema: Theorizing a New Affective Paradigm,” in *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film*, ed. Alexa Weik von Mossner (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2014), 63.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁷ Hank Umemoto’s book is a notable exception here; even as an incarcerated he was drawn to the mountains, and he eventually summited Mount Whitney in his 70s. *Manzanar to Mount Whitney: The Life and Times of a Lost Hiker* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2013).

⁵⁸ Houston, *Farewell*, 107-8.

⁵⁹ Tompkins, *West of Everything*, 75.

then in the expansive desert valley. A strong impression of incongruity emerges, a tension between confinement and openness that the environment generates whether one reads the “Play Ball!” display or not.

The barracks and mess hall replicas work in a similar way, creating affective tension at environmental and corporeal registers. Visitors can sit in the small dining area and feel how cramped and loud a mess hall would be with hundreds of people inside, three times a day, as thousands of meals are served. I step inside a barracks building, an accurately sized 20-by-25-foot room with eight metal cots and a lone bulb dangling from the low ceiling, and immediately feel the stifling loss of privacy. Especially if one sits on the tiny beds, or squeezes a rough corner of the straw-filled “mattresses,” or fondles a kitchen utensil above the enormous cast-iron stove, one senses what it was like inside these buildings for the incarcerated. The timing of my visit allows me to read the posted design plans for the not-quite-finished barracks. Placeholders for exhibits to come, words like “powerful,” “immersive,” and “personalized” recur in the written plans, echoing the intentions for the interpretive center. Although the goal is to evoke a range of personalized stories and responses to them, the plans focus on specific affects: “loss” and “frustration.” The buildings are affective agents that facilitate these goals, “material *inducement[s]*” capable of “drawing out the appropriate memories *in that location*.”⁶⁰

In other words, while NPS displays make “overt rhetorical appeals”—through compelling stories about individual incarcerated, among other things—“the material form is a silent instructor” that makes appeals “at the level of the body, where things may be felt and responded to without necessarily being verbalized or visualized.”⁶¹ What’s striking to me is the feeling of being confined inside one of the barracks, then stepping outside into the bright, dry air and seeing the mountains. This inside-outside contrast—the affective dissonance between the cramped quarters and the vast natural spaces outside—hits me “at the level of the body” and contributes to the profound sense of the “loss” and “frustration” the NPS plans articulate as affective goals. For incarcerated like Houston the natural environment accentuated the sense of entrapment enforced by the built environment. For me, there is irony in the contrast between the connotation of freedom in my cultural associations with big mountains and the confinement I feel at the site. In both cases, built and natural environments collaborate to generate feelings of loss and frustration.

Park officials play up spatial ironies in their tours. I happen upon one tour group just as ranger Rose Masters is asking a handful of teenage students to position themselves atop the remains of a camp latrine (see Figure 3). As they balance awkwardly on rusty circles of pipe peeking out from a concrete foundation in the sandy earth, the students feel how close together the toilets were. I recall a poster-size photo of a latrine inside the interpretive center’s bathroom: a close-up of three toilets practically touching. Quotations from incarcerated describe the bathroom as “humiliating” and “embarrassing.” Seeing the poster and reading these words next to a modern-day private stall gives one pause, certainly. But imagining the original latrines in this embodied way, outdoors, is more striking. The teenagers giggle nervously, their self-consciousness likely masking more profound affects. I stand apart from the

⁶⁰ Casey, “Public Memory,” 32, original emphasis.

⁶¹ Robert M. Bednar, “Being Here, Looking There: Mediating Vistas in the National Parks of the Contemporary American West,” in *Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks*, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 2.

group and out of earshot, but, even with no narrative to guide my emotional response, I nevertheless register affect corporeally. Similar to the irony I felt at the baseball field, the competing scales here—the enormous Sierra Nevada as backdrop for our small bodies, the imaginary walls of the tiny latrines within an otherwise vast valley—create an unsettled atmosphere, implicitly calling into question the democratic pretensions of a country that could barricade thousands of people within a tiny section of such a vast space. Suddenly, I hear Rose’s voice: “Will it happen again? We don’t know. We hope not. We have to stand up for what is right.” Rose’s ominous words conjure a darker environmental affect, and I sense the daunting tone that the young Houston felt when she looked at the peaks. I suspect the other tourists sense it too. If there is an affective atmosphere emerging from these assembled bodies, it is an agitated, anxious one.



Figure 3. Photograph by author.

Ranger Rose’s strategy is effective if, as Teresa Bergman and Cynthia Duquette Smith argue about a different prison, Alcatraz, “the more fully engaged visitors are with the spaces and experiences [of the place], the more likely they are to leave with a lasting impression.”⁶² Sue Embrey makes a similar claim for Manzanar. Cited on an interpretive center panel called “A Place for History,” Embrey notes: “No one could really learn from the books. You have to walk through the blocks, see the gardens, and the remains of the stone walls and rocks.” Her use of the word “walk” implies an able-bodied visitor who can get around on foot, while in reality the unstable sand at much of the site prevents wheelchair access. Still, Embrey’s insight is accurate. Part of Manzanar’s impact comes from exploring the deserted blocks and discovering signs of life, and of history, in these “remains.” Again, I feel fortunate to fit the

⁶² Teresa Bergman and Cynthia Duquette Smith, “You Were on Indian Land: Alcatraz Island as Recalcitrant Memory Space,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Blair, Carole, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 182.

demographic of the implied tourist.⁶³ I embark on a scavenger hunt for the “off the beaten path” rock gardens that ranger-historian Patricia Biggs has marked in blue ballpoint pen on my 8x11 paper map. Each discovery is a pleasurable surprise, like the charge one feels when snapping two puzzle pieces together.

The process of searching for the gardens brings its own rewards. As I wander among cottonwood and locust trees and the remaining orchards, objects shimmer in the dry heat. William Least Heat Moon describes the West’s “apparent emptiness ... [in which] makes matter look alone, exiled, and unconnected ... *Things show up out here.*”⁶⁴ For Jane Bennett, things show up when matter becomes vibrant, unconcealed, provocative in its “impossible singularity.”⁶⁵ As I walk alone through the site, I experience what she calls “thing-power,” the affective force of things. Things that show up for me include rusted tin can lids (which incarcerated used to nail over the knotholes in their floors and walls to try to keep the dust out), small bits of broken glass, a slew of bent, rusty nails (especially around the latrines), and a few brightly colored origami cranes blown from the cemetery and lodged in a cluster of sagebrush. I spot the highly toxic, hallucinogenic datura plant flowering around the camp with its large white petals, a suggestion of succulence in an otherwise dry land. A jackrabbit sprints through locusts, and a lizard does what look like little pushups for me (“posturizing,” ranger Mark Hachtmann explains later). These bits of matter—animate and inanimate, both—enhance my loneliness, my own sense of being “alone, exiled, and unconnected.” They make the site feel deserted, melancholy, and empty.

I am struck again by how hard it is to imagine thousands of people going about their busy lives, making the best of their imprisonment. And yet, they were here, and they made amazing improvements to this environment. Collecting rocks from the Inyo Mountains, east of camp, replanting trees from the camp nursery, and finding creative ways to acquire cement (which was in short supply),⁶⁶ incarcerated created dozens, if not hundreds, of gardens, including rock, flower, and “victory” gardens in their blocks, in fire breaks, and outside mess halls. Some of the gardens were practical—incarcerated produced two-thirds of their own food by the time the camp closed—and others were works of art, which NPS archaeologists are carefully excavating. Site managers supported the gardens—deeming them acceptable subject matter for photographers, perhaps because they cast relocation in a positive light⁶⁷—and incarcerated reaped their benefits. An outdoor display at the impressive Block 34 garden, titled “Waiting in Beauty,” describes the mess hall gardens as “soothing troubled spirits and easing the monotony of long mealtime lines.” They also “served as a source of block identity and pride.” Creating the gardens brought families and neighbors together, fostered community, and,

⁶³ NPS literature, too, occasionally implies an able-bodied tourist. The interpretive center is accessible and much of the site can be seen from your car. But mandates to “Stop occasionally and walk through the site” and reminders to “Wear comfortable shoes” and “Watch your step” suggest a tourist who can walk easily. NPS, *Manzanar: After Hours Guide*, 2011.

⁶⁴ Cited in Stegner, “Living Dry,” 75, original emphasis.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4.

⁶⁶ Embrey recalls how Harry Ueno, a kitchen worker, and his mess hall crew built a garden and pond outside by re-submitting the same receipt for three bags of cement. Incarcerated nicknamed it the “Three-Sacks Garden.” Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 64.

⁶⁷ Laura W. Ng, “Altered Lives, Altered Environments: Creating Home at Manzanar Relocation Center, 1942-1945” (M.A. Thesis, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 2014), 81-82.

some argue, took advantage of this acceptable, attractive, form of Japanese cultural expression to mitigate racial tensions.⁶⁸

Gardening and landscape design were an “ethnic niche” for Japanese Americans in the L.A. area beginning in the 1920s.⁶⁹ As former incarcerated Hank Umemoto quips, “Japanese were the Cadillacs of yard maintenance.”⁷⁰ Approximately 400 of the incarcerated at Manzanar already had landscape design skills, and many others acquired them in camp. The gardens are informed by a distinctive Japanese aesthetic tradition that aims to produce a “scenic and ambient mood through asymmetrical balance.”⁷¹ Block 34’s display panel explains that its garden, like several others around camp, contains “three distinct levels aligned north to south: a hill of earth represents the mountains from which water flows south to a pond, symbolizing an ocean or lake.” This garden is special for its rock animals—crane- and tortoise-shaped rock sculptures, which, the interpretive display narrative tells us, “are said to ensure ageless vitality” (see Figure 4). This sense of vitality is echoed at Merritt Park, a 1.5-acre refuge created in 1943 near the camp’s northwest corner, initially called Pleasure Park but later renamed for Manzanar Project Director Ralph Merritt. This display calls the park “an oasis of beauty and solitude” and cites Houston: facing away from the barracks and toward the park, she writes, you could “for a while not be a prisoner at all.”

While incarcerated Arthur Ogami recalls how the gardens “just gave you a good feeling,” the displays narrate specific good feelings: peace, vitality, a temporary sense of freedom in the midst of confinement. These affects are tied explicitly to national identity. The display at Block 22’s garden site, titled “Islands of Beauty, Seeds of Resistance,” claims that “Ancient Japan, the frontier West, and the Owens Valley environment all met in this garden.” Some display narratives foreground the frontier component of this triad. Tsuyako Shimizu recalls, for instance: “When we entered it was a barren desert ... When we left camp, it was a garden that had been built up without tools.” On a different display, a quote from the *Manzanar Free Press* invokes both the frontier West and Ancient Japan: “Six months ago Manzanar was a barren uninhabited desert. Today, beautiful green lawns, picturesque gardens with miniature mountains, stone lanterns, bridges over ponds ... attest to the Japanese people’s love of nature.” One could argue that these narratives play into “Orientalist expectations” that saw Japanese as close to nature and, accordingly, as “inactive, passive, and uncivilized.”⁷² But the descriptions tap into “good feelings” that are equally valued in the U.S.: freedom, love of nature, the desire for “beauty and solitude” in an otherwise crowded place. The narratives take quintessentially

⁶⁸ Ng suggests the gardens were a strategic effort by incarcerated to “appear compliant” and ease tensions in camp (87). Debates about to what degree the gardens were acts of “defiance” are ongoing. See, for instance, Kenneth I. Helphand, *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ NPS, *Cultural Landscape Report: Manzanar National Historic Site*, 2006, 115. This is my primary source for information about the gardens. Uncited quotations in this section of the essay are from NPS displays around the site.

⁷⁰ Umemoto, *Manzanar to Mount Whitney*, 121. Gardening and landscaping were the “primary livelihood for Nisei men” after the war as well (Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 97).

⁷¹ NPS, *Cultural Landscape Report*, 117.

⁷² Brett Esaki, “Multidimensional Silence, Spirituality, and the Japanese American Art of Gardening,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 16, no.3 (2013): 235-265. Cited in Ng, “Altered Lives.”

American affects and recast them as emerging from a Japanese cultural tradition. It is hard to say which country can lay greater claim to a “love of nature,” and tourists can align themselves with either nation.



Figure 4. Photograph by author.

Any feelings at the site today emerge at the confluence of personal, cultural, and national identities. The rhetoric of the displays evokes affects that manifest differently depending on how that confluence comes together. For the implied tourist, the dominant story of the gardens is one in which Japanese aesthetics combine with an American pioneer work ethic to create a pastoral garden. While the implied tourist needs to have emotions explained, textually, a tourist familiar with Japanese gardens might feel the vitality and other affects more directly. For a Japanese or Japanese American visitor, especially one familiar with garden aesthetics, I imagine the pioneer rhetoric takes a back seat to the agency of the Japanese features—like the fish ponds, waterfalls, bridges, and animal rock sculptures—in the gardens.

The “Owens Valley environment” is the most powerful force in my own encounter with the gardens. For me, there is tension between the emotions represented in the nationalistic narratives—the textual register—and the affective agency of the rock gardens themselves, the environmental register. While the displays celebrate the lush beauty of the gardens, it is hard for me, standing dry-throated in the heat, to imagine an “oasis” here, or even to think of these as “gardens” at all. The display panel at Merritt Park claims: “While the water that flowed through the pond and the plants that once graced the park are gone, these stones remain as a testament to beauty created behind barbed wire.” The rocks are “testaments,” indeed, but not to “ageless vitality.” With the help of historic photos, displays encourage tourists to “visualize” objects that once existed—a cottonwood stump, a wagon, and fish swimming in the pond, for

instance. But I find that visualization difficult. Instead, the atmosphere—especially if we compare the photos of “beautiful green lawns” to the present-day landscape—is one of desertification. If there is an “ambient and scenic mood,” it is elegiac. Another spatial irony, then: even while archeologists work to revive these brilliant gardens, the atmosphere is one of loss and desolation, not life.

While the gardens feel like memorials of sorts,⁷³ there is one designated memorial I’m eager to reach: the cemetery monument, a white obelisk with black Kanji letters that Ansel Adams’ photographs have made Manzanar’s most recognizable icon. I arrive early on my second day and am lucky to spend over an hour alone at the cemetery. Here, at the Western edge of camp, I had expected to encounter affective dissonance between the human-made monument and the mountain range. However, I find synchronicity instead. Unlike Manzanar’s ironic spaces, the cemetery emits a harmonious, peaceful atmosphere, where the sacred, serene tone of the human-built obelisk is matched and accentuated by the sublimity of the Sierra Nevada, and the quiet, stillness of the desert parallels the repose of the graves (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Photograph by author.

⁷³ Madelon Arai Yamamoto calls her father’s recently excavated fish pond a “tremendous memorial for his respect for the Japanese garden and the heritage that he brought from Japan to Manzanar.” NPS, *Aria Fish Pond*, 2013.

For over 40 years pilgrims have gathered here for “an interfaith memorial service, guided tours, displays, presentations, and music.”⁷⁴ The first pilgrimage,⁷⁵ spearheaded in 1969 by Sansei activists who were eager to learn about the camps, entailed a lot of cleanup work at the cemetery. The bitter cold—it was the coldest day of the year—“humbled” the younger generation and reminded those who’d lived in the camps of the valley’s harsh climate.⁷⁶ In interviews archived on densho.org, former incarcerated describe their impressions of the camp’s remoteness and emptiness (the obelisk was initially one of the few remains), and they recall the pilgrimages as primarily educational—as important for keeping history alive and not repeating the mistakes of the past. While some, like Robert A. Nakamura, who took photographs at the 1969 pilgrimage, describe the return as “very, very emotional,” most downplay—or perhaps struggle to narrate—their specific emotional responses.⁷⁷ Few of the interviewees I’ve seen in the densho.org archive mention the kinds of things Sue Embrey discusses: the “trauma of that first return,” the “nightmares,” the “tears that fell unchecked” and “the need to know about the pain, the psychological effects” of imprisonment.⁷⁸

In “Crossing Boundaries,” Houston grapples with her own trauma as she describes her intense affective response to revisiting Manzanar with her daughter, more than 50 years after living there. Initially she is “irritated at her[self]” for her constricting throat and stinging tears upon seeing the Alabama Hills—hadn’t her “years of therapeutic work” and cathartic memoir writing “healed the trauma?”⁷⁹ Accompanied by a Paiute docent, Richard Stewart, on this return trip, Houston revises her childhood feelings about the Sierra Nevada as an “icy barricade” and recalls how her father and some of the other Issei had found comfort in the “stately aura” of Mount Williamson, which reminded them of Mount Fuji.⁸⁰ She now senses “a grandfather’s protective power” and “unconditional acceptance” in the peaks.⁸¹

⁷⁴ NPS, *Manzanar War Relocation Center Cemetery*, 2001.

⁷⁵ Two Issei ministers, Sentoku Mayeda and Shoichi Wakahiro, had been going annually for over two decades “to pray for those who had died at Manzanar,” prior to this first group pilgrimage, (Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 119).

⁷⁶ Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 118.

⁷⁷ For instance, Matsue Watanabe does not use a single emotion word to describe her return to Manzanar, even after two direct questions about her “feeling and emotions.” She acknowledges it was “probably more emotional” for her daughter, then talks in unemotional terms about showing her daughter and some other visitors around the site. Densho Digital Archive, interview with Debra Grindeland from 7 October, 2006, accessed 16 April 2015, archive.densho.org.

⁷⁸ Bahr, *Unquiet Nisei*, 119. One exception is Miho Shiroishi, who describes her return in 2004 (for the NPS dedication) as “very emotional” and tells how she “just started crying”—and continued to cry—throughout the interpretive center, but she does not specify her reactions to the outdoor environment. Video footage shows her moving from chuckling to tears as she describes seeing personal photos and her family’s names on the wall inside. Analyzing the video interviews could be the subject of yet another potential project: a study of how emotions are displayed, and how affect is transmitted, through archival footage. Densho Digital Archive, interview with Kristen Luetkemeier from 21 August, 2012, accessed 16 April 2015, <http://archive.densho.org>.

⁷⁹ Houston, “Crossing,” 35.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39. Watanabe remarks, similarly, that the Sierra Nevada were “the most beautiful sight” upon her return to Manzanar, though she “[didn’t] ever remember seeing it as a beautiful sight when [she] lived in camp.”

Without the shared experience of being imprisoned, I can't claim empathy for these perspectives. But I do feel a "protective power" in today's cemetery. The interpretive display at the entrance tells us this is "Sacred Space," and it translates the obelisk's Kanji letters for an English-speaking audience: *I REI TO*, "Soul Consoling Tower."⁸² For the implied tourist, and for me, a mountain peak can also be a kind of "soul consoling tower," a place to seek rejuvenation. Outside of the five-foot-tall barbed wire fence that surrounds the camp's living area, the cemetery's smaller reconstructed locust fence forms a comforting enclosure. Its durable wood looks soft, and the fence's "X" pattern complements the site's other geometrical shapes: the triangular mountains, the trapezoidal slab at the base of the obelisk, the rectangular grave stones, and the circles of rocks that mark the grave sites. The NPS designed the interpretive center, in part, to "compel visitors to contemplate their own feelings of the Manzanar experience, what it's like to be forcibly displaced against your will, removed from all your possessions and placed in a guarded, barb-wire [sic] camp,"⁸³ but it is here, in the cemetery, that tourists are most compelled to contemplation. The "authenticity of affect"⁸⁴ constructed by the display is pronounced: the implied tourist should be "somber" and reverent—ready to contemplate intense feelings.

Inside the cemetery itself, there are no informational panels. Even though the echoes of the stories I just read influence my encounter, narrative details fade into the background, and physical matter becomes a more powerful agent in the affective atmosphere. The obelisk dominates. Obelisks are traditionally symbols of power, whether in ancient Egypt or in our nation's capitol, in the form of the Washington Monument. Their tone tends to be solemn and dignified. Quite unlike the Washington Monument, with its tone of phallic nationalism, the Manzanar cemetery's relatively small obelisk is humble and cross-cultural: the Buddhist Young People's organization worked alongside Catholic stonemason Ryozo Kado to erect this monument. For those who (like me) do not speak Japanese, the Kanji letters read less as narrative than as art—like the gardens, a sign of Japanese culture on the Western landscape. Even without knowing the story of the obelisk's construction, Japanese and dominant American-Western affects collide, as the Kanji characters mark a distinctive presence in a landscape the implied tourist associates with American identity, perhaps even national pride.⁸⁵

As I walk toward this obelisk, it grows larger and more pronounced—bright white against the brilliant blue sky. By the time I reach the glossy rock at its base, it obscures Mount Williamson entirely and relegates the range to a hazy backdrop. Yi-Fu Tuan identifies the aesthetic tension between vertical and horizontal as a kind of "basic polarity" that can "excite emotions that are widely shared." Specifically, the vertical evokes "a sense of striving, a

⁸² The NPS brochure lists other translations, my favorite being "this is the place of consolation for the spirit of all mankind." NPS, *Manzanar War Relocation Center Cemetery*, 2001.

⁸³ "Manzanar Front End Evaluation Focus Group Results," prepared for the NPS by Harris H. Shettel Evaluation, February 2001.

⁸⁴ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, *Public Memory*, 34.

⁸⁵ I think here of Ansel Adams' *Born Free and Equal*, a text that elicits pride in the pioneer spirit of the incarcerated, framed and reinforced by the mountains, to promote shame for the fear and nationalism that allowed their imprisonment. I explore Adams' text in *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 86-93.

defiance of gravity, while the horizontal elements call to mind acceptance and rest.”⁸⁶ The obelisk does seem to “strive”; its design draws the visitor’s gaze upward, from the angular rock at the base to the three increasingly smaller tiers, then skyward. The horizon could certainly conjure “acceptance and rest.” Still, I sense not a polarity but a congruity between this horizontal range and this vertical obelisk. Both possess a “monolithic, awe-inspiring character” that can “reflect a desire for self-transcendence.”⁸⁷ Tompkins sees an “architectural quality” in desert spaces, the way a landscape’s “monumental” qualities can “resembl[e] man-made space.”⁸⁸ The obelisk matches the range in its monumentality; both affect visitors with a tone of longevity, permanence, and a kind of sublime self-transcendence. Since I have been prepped by the narrative display to be “somber,” my mood fits. Built environment and landscape, too, collaborate in this meditative, contemplative atmosphere.

Perhaps this is an atmosphere common to all cemeteries—what Houston describes as “the antiquity, the calm energy that accumulates with years of undisturbed tranquility.”⁸⁹ For me, it is especially calming to feel my mortality, my smallness, against this immense mountain range. When viewed from the cemetery, the distinctive Western landscape asks us to retrain our perception—as Stegner puts it, to “get used to an inhuman scale” and to “understand geologic time.”⁹⁰ The lack of human presence and sparse vegetation accentuate the vast scale and facilitate this retraining. Strangely, expanding our sense of time belies the sense of “undisturbed tranquility.” Houston hints at this, in fact, when she remarks that the obelisk seems “miraculous, as if some block of stone had fallen from the peaks above and landed upright in the brush, chiseled, solitary, twelve feet high.”⁹¹ The obelisk did not fall from the peaks, of course, but if we consider them not in our time scale but in theirs, then we remember that mountains do move. All landscapes are processive and dynamic, to the point that even rocks should be thought of as “immigrant rocks.”⁹²

Sometimes, humans assist with rocks’ migrations. Here, visitors have moved rocks from camp blocks to the base of the obelisk in a process Carole Blair calls “supplementing.”⁹³ This way of adding to the archive of affect allows visitors to participate in the process of making public memory—a process the NPS display “Legacy” describes as “ongoing, unspoken conversations about America’s past and its future.” The tiered base of the obelisk acts as a sort of shrine for what the display calls “offerings,” and I find coins, bits of glass from the blocks, and wreaths of multi-colored origami cranes, which I later learn symbolize peace, long life, and good fortune.⁹⁴ Some of these offerings are gathered in the interpretive center, where they

⁸⁶ Yi –Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 28.

⁸⁷ Tompkins, *West of Everything*, 76.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁹ Houston, “Crossing,” 36.

⁹⁰ Stegner, “Living Dry,” 54.

⁹¹ Houston, *Farewell*, 189.

⁹² Doreen Massey, “Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains,” *Journal of Material Culture* 11, no. 1-2 (2006): 35, original emphasis.

⁹³ Carole Blair, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” in *Rhetorical Bodies* ed. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 40.

⁹⁴ In Japanese legend, cranes are said to live for 1,000 years. Japanese Americans fold *Senbazuru*, 1,000 cranes—one for each year of life—and string them together to give as gifts, with wishes for longevity

are encased and narrated within the genre of the museum. Seeing them outdoors, framed against the landscape, is powerful in a different way. Outside, we are not bound to any single story of the objects. Their “thing-power” adds an affective dimension to the “unspoken conversations” happening here. The corporeal register, what actual visitors feel here, must vary drastically. For many of us, though, I suspect the temporary nature of this vibrant matter adds to the contemplative atmosphere: like all our lives, these objects are transient and fragile.

Only after the obelisk and its offerings relinquish their authoritative hold on my gaze do I finally notice the actual graves. The small piles of rocks placed by visitors blend in with the sand, their circular form suggesting continuity and contributing to the sense of comfort at the site. A solitary red rose accents the former grave of “Baby Jerry Ogata” (see Figure 6). Reading the name of a victim—and the word “Baby”—is one of the most moving moments of my day. Even before reading this baby’s story,⁹⁵ the gravesite triggers a profound and anxious sadness in me. My darkest fears stir in the pit of my stomach, fears about my own children’s health and safety—dreadful, unformed affects that I rarely allow myself to narrate or even become conscious of. Cultural and national identity boundaries are, for the moment, unimportant; we will all lose loved ones in our lifetimes. After the gut-punch moment has passed, the atmosphere slowly becomes serene again: environmental, textual, and corporeal affective registers come back into alignment. The rings of rocks fit naturally in this desert landscape, and the mountains offer the supportive sense of “acceptance and rest” in death, even as their vastness accentuates the tininess of a baby’s too-short life. Physical matter can both comfort and unsettle us, providing geologic perspective, inciting distress or compassion, and confronting us with the transience of all lives.

For the moment, things appear stable—so still in fact that a fluttering scrap of paper catches my eye. The only English-language narrative within the cemetery that day, it is a handwritten note held in place by some loose change. It reads: “As Americans it is our responsibility to our fellow citizens who were used unjustly here to fight every day to stop our country from repeating this shameful chapter. We must learn from our past, especially the painful parts.” These words express one potential lesson learned at Manzanar, a sentiment that recurs in the visitor comment books inside the interpretive center.⁹⁶ But rocks are as powerful as words, here: I hear Tompkins again, calling deserts “the place where language fails and rocks assert themselves.” Language is only a small part of a greater affective assemblage, including the mountains, the obelisk, the gravestones, the sagebrush, the wind, the raven’s caws, the dry heat, and my own body. While this visitor’s note conveys an “authentic” response—

and luck. Tamiko Nimura, “For A Sister Getting Married: *Senbazuru*—1,000 Cranes,” *Discover Nikkei*, 28 June, 2013, accessed 23 January, 2015.

<http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2013/6/28/senbazuru/>.

⁹⁵ Baby Jerry’s story is told in the interpretive center and on the site bulletin: he died of a congenital heart defect at the age of two months. NPS, *Manzanar War Relocation Center Cemetery*, 2001. His remains were removed from the cemetery after WW II, along with those of eight others.

⁹⁶ I glance through the current book and find comments on everything from Obamacare to Hitler, present politics and past. Coding and assessing the comment books is yet another potential project at Manzanar.

compassion, shame, repentance—these narrated emotions fail to fully account for the messiness of the affective atmosphere.



Figure 6. Photograph by author.

As archaeologists continue to excavate the gardens, as the NPS continues to educate visitors about what happened there, as former incarcerated—or increasingly, their descendants—continue to make pilgrimages to the valley, and as new stories continue to be told and archived, Manzanar’s legacy is, like all public memory, “subject to continual reassessment and revision.”⁹⁷ When I drove out of Lone Pine at the end of my trip, I knew I might never settle on an answer to the NPS’s probing question: “What does Manzanar mean to YOU?” As the all-caps pronoun insists, affective experiences are always, to some degree, subjective. In Tuan’s formulation, “the affective bond between people and place,” which he famously calls “topophilia,” is “[d]iffuse as concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience.”⁹⁸ While my account is constrained by my positionality and my corporeality as a not-quite middle-aged, straight, white, married, economically stable, academic mother of two who is (for the moment) able-bodied, I hope it exemplifies an approach to affect that grounds it in what *Environmental*

⁹⁷ Casey, *Public Memory*, 29.

⁹⁸ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 4.

Humanities editors called, in their inaugural issue, “entanglements of agential beings.”⁹⁹ Rock animals, origami cranes, grave markers, cemetery offerings, mountain ranges, and baseball fields framed by guard towers are “agential beings,” of sorts, and I contend that the affects they carry—“ageless vitality,” peace, sorrow, solemnity, and irony—complicate the reading of Manzanar as a “site of shame.”

For me, there was no cathartic emotional experience to be had at Manzanar.¹⁰⁰ The unsettling impressions linger. I suspect this is a good thing—that noncathartic affects might be more useful for political awareness than an open-and-shut encounter with sadness or a temporary feeling of guilt that dissipates off-site. Intellectually, too, there is no “magical closure,” no decisive arguable claim, for affect theorists.¹⁰¹ For Stewart, Bennett, and others, standard ideology critique is insufficient and even detrimental to writing about affect: always focused on the human, the common scholarly approach of “demystification tends to screen from view the vitality of matter.”¹⁰² As ecocritics continue to think about matter’s agency, we should turn to affect theory to consider physical matter as “a corporeal palimpsest” that is not only “storied”¹⁰³ but also deeply affective. Getting at that affective register might require more acceptance of intellectual ambiguity and more experimental methodologies.

For environmental humanities scholars who refuse to separate ecological and social issues, it is important to ask how physical environments shape feelings about injustice. Manzanar’s “dark energy,” the valley’s “saturat[ion] with sorrows of the past,”¹⁰⁴ confronts the dominant American culture of optimism. We tend to assume that “good feelings are open and bad feelings are closed,” an assumption that “allows historical forms of injustice to disappear.”¹⁰⁵ But instead of mandating that we “be affirmative,” sites like Manzanar ask us to cultivate *bad* feelings, at least while on site, and to reflect precisely on historical injustice. If we are encouraged to feel shame or even outrage at Manzanar, then what are the prospects for turning these so-called negative emotions into empathic political action in the present?

Answering this requires a better understanding of the process by which affects—those gut punch moments at a baby’s grave, for instance—acquire the “narrative complexity of emotions” and how, inversely, the emotions we read about and contemplate at sites of public memory “denature into affects” once we depart, leaving us with an ambient sense of the place that we take home. How could we better understand the role of particular environments in this process? Could new fMRI technologies be used to provide a clearer picture of the complex affective responses to place? What might this knowledge suggest about the emotions that environmentalism should seek to evoke? Environmentalists are widely seen, in the U.S. especially, as kill-joys who preach only asceticism and sacrifice, and guilt and shame haven’t

⁹⁹ Deborah Bird Rose, *et al.*, “Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities,” *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2012): 3.

¹⁰⁰ I imagine a quite different result for, say, pilgrims who visit the cemetery.

¹⁰¹ Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 5.

¹⁰² Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xv.

¹⁰³ Iovino and Oppermann, “Material Ecocriticism,” 4, 51.

¹⁰⁴ Houston, “Crossing,” 38.

¹⁰⁵ Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” 50.

motivated Americans to action. Would pride or other cross-cultural affects about nonhuman nature be more effective in promoting global environmental action and social justice?

Of course, unanswered questions invite more research, and I encourage environmental humanities scholars to explore other eco-affective entanglements. An interdisciplinary approach is essential if we are to account for the affects that encounters with physical matter always entail. Since affect happens at the confluence of the social and the biological, it is a category of analysis that bridges the environmental humanities with the social and natural sciences. Many affect theorists are in dialogue with psychologists, anthropologists, and neuroscientists, in particular, and humanities scholars should continue to draw on these fields as well. Affect theory connects scholarship on the material—the body and its processes—with the environmental and the social in ways that remind us that very little communication is verbal, textual, or narrative. Studying affect provides a new vocabulary for describing other forms of communication and reveals new layers to our everyday encounters with places and people. It may also help clarify the intricacies of contemporary politics at larger scales.

Jennifer Ladino is an associate professor of English at the University of Idaho, where she teaches courses in American studies and literature and the environment. Her first book, *Reclaiming Nostalgia: Longing for Nature in American Literature*, was published in 2012, in the University of Virginia Press's "Under the Sign of Nature" series. This essay is part of her in-progress monograph: *Memorials Matter: Affect and Environment at American Memory Sites*.

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