MINING FOR EXPERIENCE:

THE NEW AMERICAN BOOMTOWN

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the ways that Old American West and the New American West work in tandem to continue to define this region through the analysis of circuit-like capital accumulation. The connection between old and new will be analyzed through Western Mountain towns such as Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Bozeman, Montana, and Telluride Colorado to flush out this survey. Ultimately the argument presented here will leave the reader with a more complete understanding of how cyclical capital accumulation acts as an infinite metric to grasp the occurrences of both the Old and New American West.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As I write this initial sentence, I am staring at the snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains in Bozeman, Montana. I am sitting in a conference room in the public library on Main Street, where I can see the directional sign for Bridger Bowl, the local ski hill, which is about a half hour car ride away. In the other direction, about a two hours' drive away lies the entrance to Yellowstone National Park. The proximity of these natural wonders makes a town like Bozeman unique, and a highly sought-after place to call home. Bozeman has not been exempt from the urban exodus that many smaller locales faced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cultural and physical changes that Bozeman and many similar places have experienced, and continues to experience, are dramatically shifting the landscape in this community and others like it, particularly in the Mountain West. These shifts are some I find to be peculiar and interesting, particularly in the ways they are communicated. I find great inspiration in the vernacular of such changes to write this thesis, as these shifts are, in my opinion, emblematic of the results of dramatic and rapid capital accumulation.

I will provide an analysis of the current economic and cultural climate of Bozeman, as this was my inspiration for thinking more critically and deeply about the fluctuation of capital, and the subsequent influence on the American West. Bozeman has experienced many changes since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, greatly changing the economic and cultural landscapes. Newcomers to the area have brought with them new forms of capital, which has greatly changed the on goings of the city itself. Such a change speaks to how capital gains benefit some immensely, while harming others in significant ways, both of which I will analyze closely in the following pages. As I will also explore throughout this essay, Bozeman is not the only place to experience these gains and losses. There are numerous other Western cities and towns that have experienced such changes in culture and economics in recent years that I will discuss in detail. These changes that have plagued many communities in the Mountain West in recent times are not in any way random. Rather, these changes mirror those of times past, the ones that created the American West in the first place. Lastly, I will examine how said capital gains and losses are presented to their own communities, and the subsequent effects on specific areas.

When writing the following about Bozeman in particular, I thought about the ways in which capital accumulation is spoken about not only in the American Western context, but how this is spoken about in the United States as a whole. I am specifically inspired by a quote from Leon Trotsky's book, *The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx*. He writes, "Capitalists and their advocates try in every way to hide the real extent of the concentration of wealth from the eyes of the people."[1] Trotsky argues that capitalists will do everything in their power to "hide the real extent of the concentration of wealth" from the everyman. Trotsky's analysis reveals how the capitalist machine does not just seek to amass capital, but also conceal the concentration. Trotsky's words will guide my research in the context of the contemporary American West, as I have witnessed many instances of said distortion of wealth in the short amount of time I have lived in this area. I seek to further analyze how wealth in our modern-day capitalist society is hidden, distorted, and obscured from the public at large.

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[1] Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, Charles Malamuth, and Otto Rühle, *The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx, Based on Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, (Longmans, Green and co., New York, 1939), 9.

CHAPTER TWO

THE OLD WEST

The American West is a place that is filled with wanderlust, mystery, and tantalizing uncertainty. Western cinema and literature promote these stereotypical ideas of vast landscapes, untouched natural beauty, and the sense of adventure. The Old West is still very much present in the American lexicon. But of course, time marches on, and the world changes and modernizes. However, the aforementioned attributes are still reasons for many to venture out this way.

The Extractive Economy

The American West was created in large part by extractive economies - taking things from the Earth and turning them into profitable money makers. The timber and mining industries are key examples of an extractive economy. Butte, Montana was once called the "richest hill on Earth" due to the mass amount of copper and other natural resources produced in the late eighteen-hundreds and early nineteen-hundreds.[2] Plenty of other examples of extractive economies such as Butte's dot the landscape of the American West such as the many ghost towns that were once these booming communities. Not only was the Old American West a cultural touchstone as is exemplified by any Western film, but there were real-life economic implications that fueled the creation of such lifestyles. The industries that gave way to the creation of many John Wayne movie characters are equally as important to study as the Old Western cowboy aesthetic itself. One could not exist without the other.

[2] "Butte, America," The City-County of Butte Silver Bow, accessed February 23, 2025, https://www.co.silverbow.mt.us/.

The Extractive Economy as Boomtown

The industrial hot spot occurrence, otherwise known as a "boomtown," is one that represents the tumultuous immediacy of capitalism. Having a small town or even city crop up directly because of natural-resource discovery is a process that speaks to the fragility of a boom town. In particular, when said resources run out, the town that was built around it dries up, and it is often rendered useless. Butte, Montana, is still a functioning city, where plenty of people still live and work. However, other locales were not able to evolve into a modern city or town. There are many former boomtowns used for mining gold, copper, and other valuable resources, that have now been abandoned and turned into ghost-towns. Although the town might have gone bust, in many instances, the formerly occupied structures remain. Bannack, Montana, is a place that exemplifies this relationship between money-making natural resource discovery and establishment of a boom town. After prospectors discovered gold in a nearby creek in 1862, the town of Bannack sprang up with its population soon swelling to three-thousand people. However, by the nineteen-fifties, the resources this place was once reliant on had dried up, and the town did as well.[3] Now, Bannack is a preserved state park and national landmark with different styles of buildings all in various states of both preservation and dilapidation. In the skeleton-like buildings of the main street, one can see this was once a full-fledged town complete with multiple stores, a hotel, and a schoolhouse. See below:

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[3] "Bannack Historic District," Historic Montana, accessed February 23, 2025, https://historicmt.org/items/show/2212.

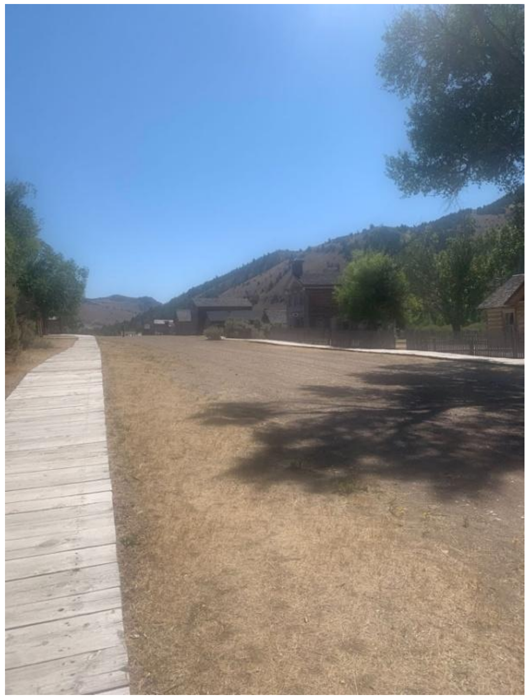

Figure 1. Main Street at Bannack, MT

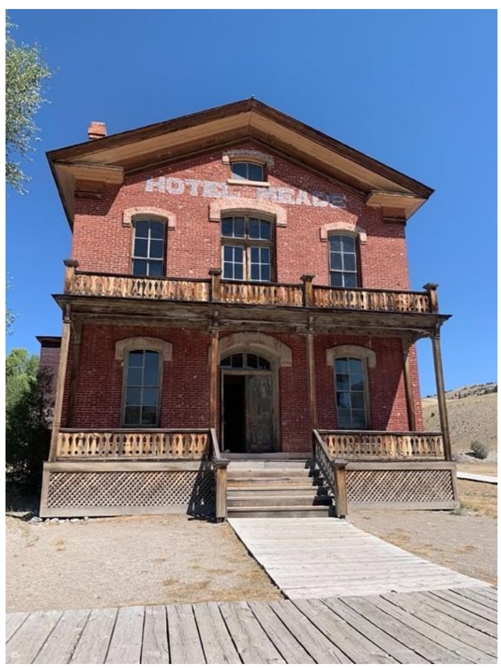

Figure 2. Hotel Meade at Bannack, MT

These two images depict what was a once booming mining town. A town like Bannack, as with many others, could only exist because of the discovery of gold nearby. The complex relationship between the creation of a boom town and prospecting natural resources is one that is reliant on both parts of the equation - something I will explain further on in more depth. But Bannack is surely not the only place where this boom-and-bust cycle has taken place. I traveled to Bannack over the summer, as with other ghost town locales in order to conduct research and images for this essay. Below are images from an abandoned fraternity hall and the site of a once-existing barbershop in Elkhorn, Montana, a substantial mining town which is now abandoned that I visited in the summer of 2024:

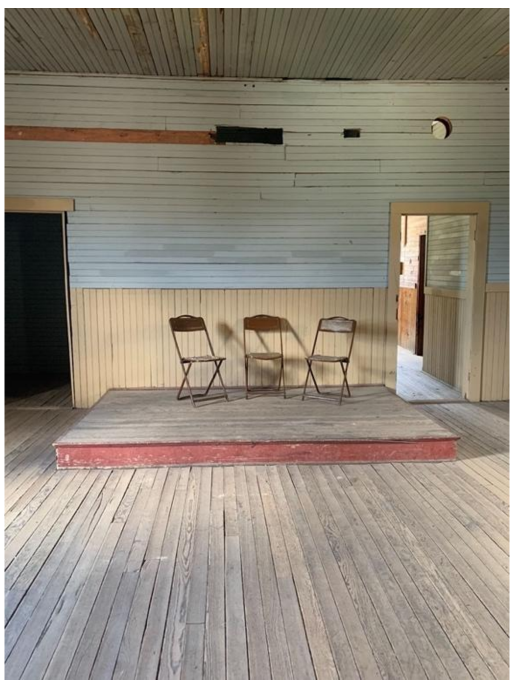

Figure 3. The upstairs area of the Fraternal Hall in Elkhorn, MT

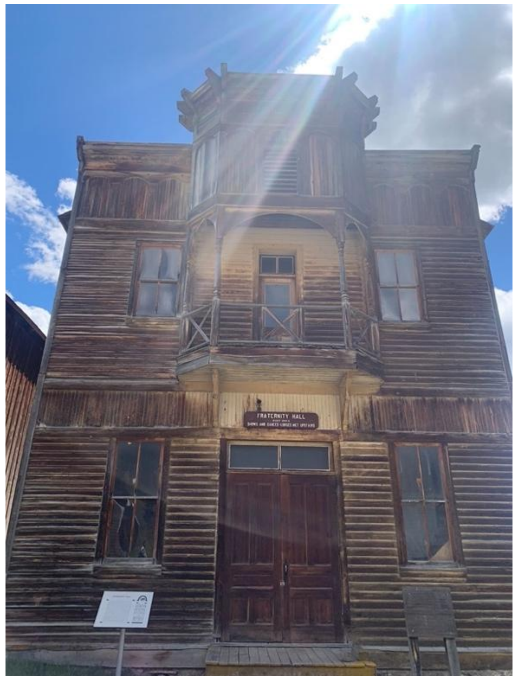

Figure 4. The outside of the Fraternal Hall in Elkhorn, MT

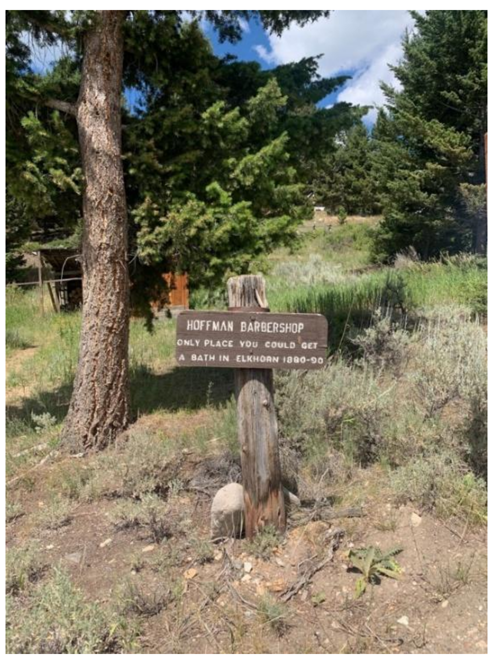

Figure 5. The present-day site of what was once the barbershop in Elkhorn, MT.

The images above show the state Elkhorn now finds itself in - abandoned and falling apart at the seams. At its peak, the Elkhorn mine was producing $30,000 worth of ore monthly.[4] For reference, below is an image of what Elkhorn once looked like in 1898, during the peak of not just its mining days, but the peak of the town's own bustling existence.

Figure 6. Elkhorn, Montana from 1898, when the town was a thriving mining community.

The difference between the 1898 image and the 2024 images above is astounding. What was once a populated, lively community is now reduced to shades of extinction. This noted difference speaks to how much places like these were dependent on natural resource extraction. Elkhorn, much like many other places, only existed *because* of the mine that cropped up upon a prospector's discovery. The relationship between local economy and the Earth itself is one that came to embody the Old West, for this was the creation of the actual Old West.

[4] "Elkhorn Montana," Western Mining History, accessed February 15, 2025, https://westernmininghistory.com/towns/montana/elkhorn/.

All around Montana, and the West are places like Elkhorn and Bannack. Once prosperous, now essentially abandoned. The degradation of such places speaks to the cycles of capitalism that are unique to the boom/bust-town nature of the American West. The relationship between resource extraction and local economy is one that can be demonstrated through a base-superstructure model coined by Karl Marx. In this model, the base and superstructure work in harmonious tandem in order to synthesize various facets of society. The base is the mode of production. Examples of this include human physical labor, private property, or raw materials. The superstructure then analyzes the effects of these modes of production. Examples of superstructures consist of culture, political ideology, and legal ideology. Cultural critic Raymond Williams brought this idea into the modern era via his article titled, "Base and Superstructure in Cultural Marxist Theory," featured in the November/December 1973 edition of *The New Left Review*. Williams criticizes this system through the duration of the article, but he also provides a substantial definition of the model. He writes, "'The base' is the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of the development of material productive forces. 'The base' is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development." Williams creates a clear framework for how the base acts as a foundation to analyze economic interests, and/or what he refers to as "material productive forces". Williams continues to define the superstructure as, "the reflection, the imitation or the reproduction of the reality of the base in the superstructure."[5] He rounds out this analysis with demonstrating how the superstructure reflects the base. Specifically, using the base to establish these economic modalities, and then using the superstructure to analyze how the

[5] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Cultural Marxist Theory," The New Left Review, no. 82 (1973).

economic factors get turned into culture at large. The base and superstructure must work together, according to both Marx and Williams, to complete said analysis.

If one were to apply this model to a town such as Butte or Elkhorn, the means of production or economic component would be the discovery of natural resources such as gold, which would act as the base. In turn, the superstructure itself would consist of the results of said discovery. To return to Williams, the boomtown that cropped up around the natural recourse finding "mirrors" the base of the literal discovery. The creation of a town or city around an economic discovery is the overall superstructure. Here, the base and superstructure act in a reliant pattern. This creation of a full-fledged community is based on natural resource extraction, but said town cannot exist without the riches of the driving economic force, be it gold, silver, or timber. The base superstructure model goes beyond a simple cause-and-effect mode of analyzing places such as the ones I have described. With this model, it can clearly be shown the reliance on natural resource gathering to foster what crops up around it in specified economic and subsequent cultural terms.

Under the system of capitalist production, the resource transforms into a commodity. A simple seeming commodity is not so simple when it is the motivating factor for the creation of a town, in the instance of the boom town model. Marx has coined the term "commodity fetishism" to help define such a transformation. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx opens the section about such aptly titled, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." He opens this section by writing, "A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[6] Marx's initial framing of his commodity fetishism discourse illustrates how a commodity can be "queer" or in other words, multi-faceted. The complexities that arise from the commodity under capitalism result in a new web of social and economic relationships, catapulting its meaning from simple object to multi-dimensional commodity.

Marx, of course, is not the only thinker to ponder such transformations. In the essay, "Mystification: Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life," theorist Henri Lefebvre notes the multifaceted nature of a single commodity under capitalism. He writes, "Capitalism is a system for producing merchandise. When it turns into merchandise, the object becomes detached from itself, so to speak. It enters a system of relationships that are expressed through it, so that in the end it seems to be the subject of these relationships."[7] Lefebvre notes how the system of capitalism can transform a simple commodity. In this system, a simple item or, what he refers to as "merchandise," takes on a new role, acting as a commodity, or in other words, something to be purchased. Lefebvre also addresses how under capitalism, merchandise is subject to be purchased, and acts as a perpetuation of the capitalist system. Lefebvre's words summarize how crucial the actual commodity itself is within the cycle of capitalism. Marx sets the groundwork for commodity transformation in *Capital*, while modern scholars like Lefebvre discuss these ideas in a more modern context. In the context of this thesis, however, one can see how a simple good such as wood gets transformed into a commodity. Lumber could be an example of the outcome of said transformation. This lumber then can be brought to market, sold, and used to bolster the wealth of the capitalist, perpetuating the capitalist cycle. This profitable cycle then

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[6] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1, A Critical Analysis of Capital Production*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels, (International Publishers Co., 1967), 71.
[7] Henri Lefebvre, "Mystification: Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life," in *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*, ed. Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, and Eleonore Kofman (Continuum Press, 2003), 82.

results in the creation of the boom town, with people creating residences around the site of the extraction in order to potentially profit. During this process, the lumber itself becomes a profitable commodity, demonstrating how the commodity can be fetishized as a tool for capitalist accumulation. In this example, the lumber becomes an object of desire, as this desire is equal to the capital that it will eventually accumulate. This desire ultimately presents itself as the fetishization Marx speaks to. Both Marx and Lefebvre illustrate how crucial the commodity itself is within the capitalist system.

Above, I noted how the Old and Wild West depicted in literature and film could not exist without the very real extractive economies of the West, and the equally very real reliance on natural resources themselves. From a cultural standpoint, the base-superstructure model itself works in a different way. It could be said that without the reality of a mining or timber community, prospectors and their entourages would not be drawn to this area - whether that be for sheer adventure-seeking sake, or simple economic-based desires to strike it big and therefore accumulate capital. This migration, regardless of intentions, allowed for the real Wild West to be formed, just for it to be subsequently portrayed in fictional novels, songs, theater, and film. In whatever form the American West is analyzed, it is clear economic factors have driven boom and bust cities and towns, whether they are fully functioning in the present day. With Marx's base-superstructure model in the Western context as a guide, I will complete the rest of my analysis of the contemporary West.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEW WEST - BOZEMAN, MONTANA

The days of a rowdy saloon shoot-out may be in the past, but the transition of the Old West to the New West, the contemporary West, is certainly not exempt from a boom-town economy that once could be seen in a place like Elkhorn or Bannack. The New West, like much of present-day society, can still be analyzed through a base-superstructure model. This model speaks to how culture, whether that be culture of a specific area, or popular culture is very much reliant on economic factors. The reliance on such can be analyzed further through the lens of American capitalism. Unfettered capitalism occurring in the extractive territories of what were once Western Territories speaks to the fragile nature of such an economic system. In these cases, it can be said that an entire community's existence (or lack thereof) is solely based on the production of a mineral or other natural resources.

The New Extractive Economy

However, just because a town has now gone bust does not mean it is totally rendered useless. In some instances such as Elkhorn or Bannack, this is unfortunately the case. But for other Western locales, a new kind of extractive economy has taken shape. In some instances, the extractive economy never *really* went away, it just has taken a different shape in the present day. Kristal Jones notes this dichotomy in her essay, "Room to Grow But Growth for Who?". She importantly discusses this new extractive economy taking shape in Bozeman. This new extractive economy does not consist of mining the earth itself, but the creation of homes based on proximity to nature itself. "If the attraction of communities like Bozeman is their proximity to wildlands and their quaint small-town character, then the boom increases the population and development pressures to the degree that the recourse is diminished". Jones repurposes the idea of extractive economy to apply in the modern-day context of Bozeman. Now, said extractive economy is hinged on development pressures to house the population boom. She completes this idea by linking past and present writing, "Real estate speculation in high-amenity communities can be considered what political economists call extractive capitalism, in which the economic value of natural resources flows away from their local source to concentrate in the bank accounts of investors or firms based far afield". Jones highlights the economic flows taking shape in the modern-day context of the New West. Here, the resource being extracted is not timber or ore, but instead the "economic value" of the surrounding nature. This new "economic value" leads to the creation of new capital flows to be developed, even if they are concentrated in what she states as "firms based far afield". Lastly, she makes the explicit connection between past and present by noting, "Boomtowns used to be based on lodes of gold and silver, with resources from outside the region providing capital to drive local economic growth but also to extract even more value, creating profits that did not stay in the community."[8] Jones' analysis provides an explicit connection between boomtowns of yesteryear, and those of today. Her inclusion of the terms "far afield" and "profits that do not stay in the community," highlight the fluidity of the new boomtown, and the original boomtown's economic model.

However, there are some differences between the two. In the original boom town model, the local economy was quite fixed and simple. A physical extraction was performed, the commodity itself extracted and brought to market, and then sizable communities cropped up to

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[8] Kristal Jones, "Room to Grow But for Who," in *Watershed Moment, The American West in the Age of Limits*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Evelyn Brister, and Luther Propst (University of Utah Press, 2024), 141.

reap the benefits of the commodity. Once a new extractive commodity was located elsewhere, the prospectors and capitalists alike would move to where this new extraction was taking place. A fairly simple, fixed occurrence. Jones discusses the present-day extractive community that relies on capital from afar to be brought into the community, allowing for a more transient commodity exchange. The new boomtown model still relies on the same boomtown-like modality, but it is now more fluid, relying on capital that is often brought from other places. However, both models of boomtowns are intrinsically reliant on the surrounding natural resources. Although there are distinctive properties between the past and current boomtowns, it is clear that not much has changed. The original concept of a boomtown has remained the same, however the resources it relies upon look quite different today.

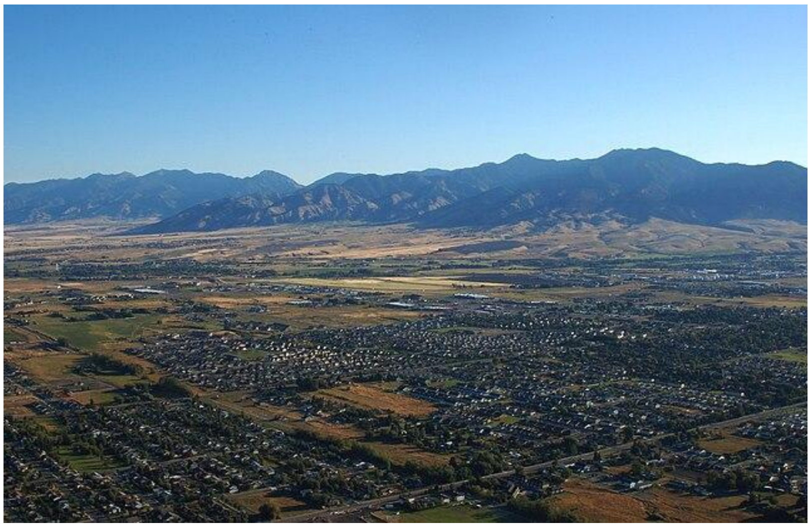

Figure 7. Gallatin Valley - Home to Bozeman, MT

The idea of a boomtown as an economic model that defines a specific area can be mapped onto the base-superstructure model, of course, in order to synthesize the local culture with economic factors. In the context of this modern analysis of Bozeman, the proximity to nature acts as the desirable variable to attract newcomers to move to the area. The new capital that comes with them affects the once-existing economic flows, changing the economic dynamics of the town. These changed economic flows can affect a myriad of factors - real estate prices, business development, and cultural ongoings. Bozeman is certainly no exception to these changed economic forces due to its proximity to natural wonders.

The New Bozeman

Bozeman's population saw a dramatic increase during COVID-19 pandemic years. Bozeman and Montana as a whole were not alone in seeing such growth. According to the United States 2021 census, the top three states that experienced the highest population growth during this time frame were Idaho (2.9% growth), Utah (1.7% growth), and Montana (1.7% growth) - all states that make up the Western region.[9] Clearly, much change has been had in this region because of this growth, especially Montana. The growth, regardless of intention, can vastly alter an already existing landscape. A March 6th, 2024, article from local news outlet *KBZK Bozeman* titled, "Bozeman Home Prices Reaching an All-Time High, Raising the Cost Across Gallatin County," notes the rapid increase in housing prices. It specifically cites how housing prices are about to "approach a median of $1 million". It should also be stated that the median price for a single-family home is currently "$979,500," which is $52,000 less than the median of a single-family home in Seattle, Washington[10]. From the data presented in this article,

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[9] "U.S. Population Grew 0.1% in 2021, Slowest Rate Since Founding of the Nation," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed February 23, 2025, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/us-population-grew-in-2021-slowest-rate-since-founding-of-the-nation.html
[10] Cassidy Powers, "Bozeman Home Prices Reaching an All-Time High, Raising the Cost Across Gallatin County," *KBZK Bozeman*, March 6, 2024, https://www.kbzk.com/news/local-news/bozeman-home-prices-reaching-an-all-time-high-raising-the-cost-across-gallatin-county-and-the-region#:~:text=Bozeman%20home%20prices%20reaching%20an,that's%20%2452%2C000%20more%20than%20Seattle.

one can gather how Bozeman and the larger Gallatin County area are rapidly changing places, increasingly becoming more costly to reside in - even more costly than that of Seattle, a major US coastal city that is a well-known high cost of living area. The Bozeman area is increasingly catering to those who can afford these high prices.

The influx of wealth speaks to how cyclical modern economics can be. As previously stated, the boomtown model that once birthed the American West can be reiterated in modern contexts. However, in present time, other factors define this extractive economy. One of these factors, as Jones noted prior, could be, of course, the natural resources themselves. For example, the Bozeman Real Estate Group's webpage notes specifically how nature itself can provide a landscape for enticing outdoor activities such as, "some of the biggest skiing in America… the best fly-fishing in the world, and thousands of acres of public land."[11] Bozeman Real Estate Group's list of activities are a summary of reasons why people move to Bozeman in the first place. Again, nature itself is the reason activities such as skiing and ice climbing exist, which then draw certain demographics to relocate. But there is much more that define Bozeman than its current status of a growing hotspot filled with outdoor-enthusiasts. The growth that this community has seen is also not random or unique. The expansions that are currently being made are merely other iterations of the cyclical nature of capitalism.

Bozeman is shrouded in picturesque, beautiful nature. Stunning mountain ranges surround the valley it sits in, with Yellowstone National Park, various ski resorts, and other nature-based attractions being only short drives away. These are definite draws for people to

[11] "Why Are So Many People Moving to Bozeman, Montana?," Bozeman Real Estate Group, accessed February 30, 2025, https://bozemanrealestate.group/blog/why-are-so-many-people-moving-to-bozeman#:~:text=With%20some%20of%20the%20biggest,is%20an%20outdoor%20enthusiast%20dream.

come visit the region or even purchase property. The abundance of such attractions can significantly affect the local economy, and how individuals in the region interact with such.

Thomas Power and Richard Barnett touch upon this in their book, *Post-Cowboy Economics: Pay and Prosperity in the New American West*. They specifically cite locales in the American West that are "surrounded by forests" such as Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, Sheridan, Wyoming, and of course, Bozeman, as places where, "lumber and wood products were once important industries."[12] Power and Barnett note the industries that once boosted these communities, and how said industries could only exist because of the proximity to the abundance of natural resources. They then describe how "technological change" worked to modernize this industry, and the need for skilled labor declined, or even become nonexistent. In its place, they write that industries such as retail and tourism trade largely took over. The concentration of analysis largely takes place in the 1970's and 80's. They note that in 1978, Montana and Idaho resource-based industries accounted for sixty percent of the country's wood production employment, but by 1998, this workforce declined by thirty percent, eliminating an estimated nine-thousand jobs.[13] This statistic highlights how the decline of an industry can affect job growth and retention, or lack thereof. The crucial connection between these two examples from these authors shows that although one industry downgraded, in its place, tourist-based industries grew. The natural resources in Montana, in this case lumber, fueled the rise of industry. However, these same natural resources also fueled the rise of the tourism industry in the area years later.

[12] Thomas Michael Power and Richard N. Barrett, *Post Cowboy Economics, Pay and Prosperity in the American West* (Island Press, 2001), 85.
[13] Thomas Michael Power and Richard N. Barrett, *Post Cowboy Economics, Pay and Prosperity in the American West* (Island Press, 2001), 54.

The reliance on natural resources speaks to the cyclical nature of the Western economy, both past and present, and can be rooted in the surrounding natural makeup. Both of these examples, the lumber and tourist industry, can be defined by the base-superstructure model. In the case of this region, lumber is the cause of industry creation, and therefore towns and cities cropped up around this industry. Despite the lumber industry being depleted in the latter half of the twentieth century, the places that originally were created in tandem with said industry (that are still in existence) have found new usage for these same natural resources to create new industries, changing the local economic landscape once again.

Resource As Commodity

I have made clear how pertinent the relationship with nature and natural resource extraction/production has been the cornerstone for places such as Bozeman to exist (and continue to exist). The reliance on said resources is a hallmark for the history of the creation of the West. This dependent relationship, both past and present, is delicate. The accumulation of capital is dependent on cyclicality. In the second volume of *Capital*, Marx identifies the three stages capital is accumulated in, and how these three stages are dependent on one another for the perpetuation of capitalism to act in what he refers to as a “circuit”. He describes the first stage as when a capitalist purchases a share of the labor market, yielding him commodity production. In this case, the timber industry. This stage could be presented in a capitalist purchasing a company to produce lumber. Marx describes the second phase as the actual creation of the commodity at hand. Importantly, Marx notes that in this stage, the commodity is now worth more than the elements that created the commodity in the first place.

In this application, the finished commodity of timber brought to market would hold more value than the sum of the raw parts, i.e., trees themselves. The third stage consists of the commodity being bought and sold, yielding capital profits for the capitalist. In this instance, the capitalist owner of said timber company reaps the monetary value of the recourse being produced. Marx lays the groundwork for the circuit network to be established in a capitalist economy. In this volume, he importantly notes that, "circulation is just as necessary as production itself."[14] Marx's three stages of circulation can aid in identifying how natural resources in a place like Montana can be commodified, brought to market, and therefore create capital to be amassed by the capitalist. More so, he importantly describes how these three stages create an important circuit that is equally important to the production of said raw material itself. By mapping this circuit model onto a place with an abundance of natural resources with the potential to be commodified, such as Montana, one can understand the economic flows that allowed the West to flourish (and then go bust in some cases) economically. These economic flourishes then result in the construction of towns and cities such as Bozeman, in which the capitalists can continue their business dealings.

This circuit is still applicable to view how American capitalism has continued on into present time, retaining this cyclical mode. The novella *Bonsai*, although based on a fictional romantic relationship, poetically highlights the dependent interplay between the actual bonsai plant, and the pot that it sits in. Author Alejandro Zambra writes, "It consists of two elements: the living tree and the container. The two elements must be in harmony".[15] Zambra's use of the word

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[14] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume Two*, trans. I. Lasker (Progress Publishers, 1956), chap. 2, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1885-c2/ch02.htm.
[15] Alejandro Zambra, *Bonsai,* trans. Caro De Robertis (Melville House, 2008) 75.

harmony in this example highlights the notion of this dependent relationship between nature and economy that define a place like Bozeman, and elsewhere in the American West.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEW WEST - ZOOMTOWN, USA

Thus far, I have presented analysis demonstrating how the land itself has fueled economies in the West, both past and present. A place like Bozeman has changed dramatically since its inception because of the natural wonders surrounding it. The aforementioned extractive economy concept remains the driving force for economic, and subsequent cultural, ebbs and flows. However, other forces can vastly change population growth, employment opportunities, the rise (or fall) of certain industries, etc. The COVID-19 pandemic for example, could be deemed as such a force. Although the pandemic was health-based, and not necessarily economic, the aftereffects of it have greatly altered a place like Bozeman, and many other communities throughout the West. The pandemic in its pure form was a result of an infectious virus. But the consequences of said virus resulted in shutdowns of schools, shops, and entire industries. Therefore, many were forced (or chose) to relocate elsewhere. The virus itself does not hold much economic value, but the consequences of its infectious nature caused the global economy to be greatly altered via shutdowns, supply-line disruptions, and overall panic hold economic value. Bozeman was certainly no exception to this migration during the pandemic years. Above, census data is cited explicitly showing this growth in 2021, a year that was still very much being consumed by the pandemic. It is also noted here that the housing price increases in the area around this time as well, demonstrating a clear correlation between pandemic-era population growth and affecting the local real estate market.

Yes, the pandemic could be listed as a reason for population ebbs and flows during the early years of the 2020's, which still hold lasting effects. However, these post-pandemic changes have brought about new ways in which wealth, and/or capital accumulation is discussed. A recent *Newsweek* article titled, "House Prices Hit One-Million in One Small US City," highlights the direct correlation between the pandemic and rise in home prices. It notes, "the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends of Americans who earn big-city salaries moving to Bozeman, a rural city, bringing with them the purchasing power of a San Francisco and New York resident". The inclusion of the words purchasing power is imperative to understanding shifting economic flows. Now, Bozeman is experiencing an influx of capital from new places such as San Francisco or New York, greatly affecting the economic landscape because of the pandemic. Furthermore, the article notes how the pandemic-era "work from home" lifestyle has also affected the area. Journalist Omar Mohammad interviews a representative from the aforementioned Bozeman Real Estate Group, who notes,

> Bozeman is rural, there's no doubt about that. But does a rural location matter when there are Zoom Meetings and Google Hangouts along with direct flights to 21 major metropolitan areas?" the Bozeman Real Estate Group said. 'Throw in a global pandemic, and all of a sudden working remotely from a place like Bozeman seems like a pretty good idea'.16

This article proves a clear correlation with the rise of pandemic-spawned work from home lifestyle with the increase in population and therefore increase in real estate prices. Clearly, the pandemic transformed the ways in which Bozeman operates in both economic and real estate terms.

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[16] Omar Mohammad, "House Prices Hit One-Million in One Small US City," *Newsweek*, March 7, 2024, https://www.newsweek.com/house-prices-hit-1-million-one-small-us-city-1876966.

The Zoomtown Takeover

Bozeman is not the only mountain town that has seen such changes. An article titled, "The Rise of 'Zoom Towns' in the Rural West," speaks to such change. It notes the influx of "remote workers" flooding such places. It makes a direct correlation between the Old West of oil-rich boomtowns and the advent of remote-worker-filled "zoom towns". "Like oil discovery led to western boomtowns, the pandemic has led to the rise of 'Zoom Towns'."[17] The pandemic greatly affected population migration worldwide, but in the context of the American West, it brought an influx of people who have the ability to work from home, and therefore, essentially live anywhere they please. Acclaimed Western author and historian Wallace Stegner once wrote, "The untrammeled individualist persists partly as residue of the real and romantic frontiers, but also partly because runaways from more restricted regions keep reimporting him".[18] The desire to flee what Stegner refers to as a "restricted region," could correlate to the desire of freedom found in the American West, particularly in pandemic times, where nearly every movement was restricted, especially in urban centers like New York City. Although Stegner did not write this text during the pandemic years, his sentiments of relocation to the West remain timely.

The ways in which capitalism must adapt to such changes as a global pandemic speak to the frantic and dependent nature of the system. Scholar Anna Kornbluh addresses this idea of the frenetic nature of capitalism in her 2023 book, *Immediacy: Or The Style of Too Late Capitalism*. She colloquially notes her term of "Step On It!" immediacy, and explains how this transpires in

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[17] "The rise of 'zoom towns' in the rural west." *Space Daily*, 16 Oct. 2020. *Gale General OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A638507494/ITOF?u=mtlib_1_1123&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=f6198df2. Accessed 5 Mar. 2025.

[18] Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space*, (University of Michigan Press, 1987), 80.

the context of modern capitalism. She writes, "even so, the gamble here is that immediacy comprehensively unifies contemporary culture, and that its capitalist substrate takes definite form."[19] Kornbluh speaks to how the urgent cries of immediacy allow for capital to "take definite form." In the context of pandemic-era/post-pandemic-era Bozeman, one can see how capitalism can form, or "unify," culture. In this case, the culture of the urban exodus during the pandemic in turn ratified Bozeman's local culture, bringing with it new forms of capitalism, which ultimately has led to a changed economic landscape. Although the culture of immediate capitalism in the context of Bozeman is not necessarily "hidden," to refer to Trotsky's words, it is imperative to understand the current flows of capitalism that are taking place. One can flee the constricted life of the big city for a place like Bozeman, where the landscapes are expansive and the air fresher. But where this has an underlying effect is for the people that have *already* been living in these locations.

For instance, a recent local news article cites a count of more than three-hundred unhoused individuals in the community.[20] Bozeman is not that large of a city, with 57,305 residents according to the 2023 census.[21] Although homelessness is not the only symptom of a rapidly growing community, it is one that remains important in analyzing present-day housing statistics - an important part of gauging the economic landscape. To be clear, I am not "blaming" adventurous individuals who moved to Bozeman in recent years for this displacement of vulnerable individuals. Instead, I seek to create a connection between this newfound

[19] Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism* (Verso Books, 2024), 13.
[20] Jolee Sallee, "HRDC Finds More Than 300 Unhoused People in Bozeman, New Shelter to Open in 2025," *KBZK News*, February 6, 2024, https://www.kbzk.com/news/local-news/hrdc-finds-more-than-300-unhoused-people-in-bozeman-new-shelter-to-open-in-2025.
[21] "Quick Facts Bozeman City, Montana," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed February 24, 2025. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bozemancitymontana/PST045224.

"zoomtown" dynamic in relation to this community at large. The "zoom town"-ification of an area, particularly in the Mountain West, is rooted in the work-from-home pandemic era, which ultimately gave way to a new sense of transiency as long as there was a strong internet connection. This transiency speaks to the immediacy, or "I need it now" style of capitalism currently at hand.

I have defined what it means to be a "zoom town" in the post-pandemic landscape, and made the correlation between "boom town" versus "zoom town", or in other words, the "Old West" versus the "New West". Clearly there is not much difference between the two, as both are reliant on cyclical economic forces, often dependent on the natural surroundings. Furthermore, I have clearly demonstrated how Bozeman fits in this category, and the reasons that it drew newcomers here in such a fraught time. Lastly, I have analyzed how the immediacy of capitalism has ultimately led to a changed environment. Bozeman is not alone in such a transformation. Many other Western towns and cities have fallen victim to "zoom town" status.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEW WEST - JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

The New West can be seen as a luxurious outpost. Places such as Aspen, Colorado, Sun Valley, Idaho, and Jackson Hole, Wyoming dot the map of the Rocky Mountains with their upscale mountainous culture. These places are actively redefining what it means to be a Western Mountain town. A four-hour drive south of Bozeman lies Jackson Hole. The two locales share many similarities. They are both places with many outdoor activities, particularly skiing and snowboarding, making both places ideal destinations for those who participate in this recreation. Both are home to luxe ski resorts, for example, that attract a certain type of bourgeois clientele. Jackson Hole in particular exudes extreme wealth and opulence. Such concentrated wealth in turn creates an interesting dynamic for the community. As someone who lived in Jackson for a little under a year, the contradictions in how wealth is displayed and discussed were both very apparent at times, and not at others. The dynamics of the founding of the American West certainly apply to Jackson, and are important to analyze.

The Leveraging of Nature

Sociologist and Yale Professor Justin Farrell observes and reports on such in his book, *Billionaire Wilderness*. Farrell interviews many uber-wealthy residents of Teton County, Wyoming, where Jackson Hole is located, who have actively worked to shape the area into what it is today. For context, Farrell notes that Teton County is the richest county in the United States, but also the county with the greatest wealth inequality in the country.[22] Known as a wealthy enclave in the Rocky Mountain range, Jackson Hole sits in close proximity to Grand Teton National Park as well as Yellowstone National Park, making it an ideal destination for those who seek a nature-filled, rural environment, whether that be to live or simply visit. As Farrell notes, however, the rural beauty does not excuse Teton County from the plagues of wealth concentration and subsequent inequality that are present in the rest of the nation. As Farrell interviews both the haves and the have-nots throughout the book, an interesting thread starts to form highlighting the ways wealth is discussed.

In the beginning of the section titled, "Using Nature to Solve Economic Dilemmas," Farrell notes how the ultra-wealthy use nature and nature-based philanthropic endeavors as mere tools to accumulate even more wealth for themselves. He writes, "conservation itself can become a tool for economic gain, social prestige, and exclusion."[23] Farrell's inclusion of the word tool here represents the ways in which the wealthy elite utilize their status in society to leverage the accumulation of more wealth, all while under the guise of conservation, something largely seen as a benevolent act. Because of this wealth, those who cannot afford this area are therefore forced to reside elsewhere and are consistently excluded from the community. It should be noted that the state of Wyoming itself fuels this rapid wealth accumulation. Author Luther Propst addresses this in his chapter of the book, *Watershed Moment: The American West in the Age of Limits,* titled, "Exploring the Costs of Growth, Jackson Hole, Wyoming." He notes, "Industrial-scale high-value tourism, a state tax code that is most favorable in the nation in preserving wealth, and state trust laws that attract hidden capital finance a disproportionate share of

[22] Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness*, (Princeton University Press, 2020), 24.
[23] Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness*, (Princeton University Press, 2020), 77.

Wyoming's budget and create prosperity and wealth in Jackson."[24] He identifies how the state of Wyoming *itself* aids in attracting the already-wealthy, just for these same people, in turn, to take advantage of said codes to become even more wealthy. Propst utilizes the word "hidden" in this quote, similar to Trotsky's words above, painting Wyoming as a place where it is easy for the ultra-wealthy to retreat into concealed bliss, all while using the state apparatus at hand to their fiscal advantage. Farrell and Propst both uncover how both the state of Wyoming itself and privatized philanthropic organizations work in tandem to allow the ruling class to continue to prosper, all while under concealment of "loving" and wanting to "preserve" surrounding nature. Although sheer wealth accumulation can be hidden away in Teton County, the ways in which said wealth is leveraged is not always hidden. Farrell notes above how conservation can act as a leveraging tool for Jackson's elite community - something that arguably could be unique to a rugged place like the Tetons.

Farrell's research into philanthropic practices in Jackson via the interviews he conducts makes it clear that for many wealthy Jacksonites, participating in charity work acts as just another page in their wealth-building portfolio. Farrell spends a great deal of this chapter discussing the Jackson Hole Land Trust, and his interviewee's involvement with the organization. He notes that a land trust is, "a safe way that the ultra-wealthy can get involved in environmentalism. Land Trusts conserve land by working directly with private landowners, which is viewed by most as a safe and noncontroversial activity."[25] The inclusion of the word "safe" is interesting here as the land trust in question is billed as a way to interact with private

[24] Luther Propst, "Exporting the Costs of Growth, Jackson Hole, Wyoming," in *A Watershed Moment, The American West in the Age of Limits*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Evelyn Brister, and Luther Propst (University of Utah Press, 2024), 129.
[25] Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness*, (Princeton University Press, 2020), 105.

landowners. In other words, Big Government or the State is not involved in this wealth-building philanthropy - a win-win situation for both the giver and the receiver. Private property is still intact in these exchanges, and the uber-wealthy get to bill themselves as charitable, morally correct residents who allegedly deeply care about their much sought-after surroundings.

Although this conservation work is not a secret as it is explicitly stated in this book (and elsewhere) there is much to be said about how this specific type of charitable nature is secretly used as a tool for leveraging the advancement of private fortune. Returning to the above introductory quote from Farrell, the uber-wealthy who have decided to put down stakes in Jackson Hole are continuing to accumulate wealth under the guise of morally correct charitable practices. By participating in a land trust organization or the like, wealthy people are using this practice to distract from their cash-grab which in the end benefits mostly themselves. When writing off said cash-grab as charitable, the actualities of being an uber-wealthy individual seem to be written off as "good." Secondly, accumulating wealth under the guise of nature conservation only adds to this "hiding" practice that both Trotsky and Farrell identify, which in turn, greatly affects the area both from an economic standpoint and a cultural one.

The Precarity of a Mountain Town

I lived in Jackson Hole for nine months when I was twenty-four years old, waiting tables at a family run pizza shop amid the COVID-19 pandemic. During my free time, my coworkers, friends and I would explore the downtown area, frequenting bars, restaurants, and shops. There definitely is not a lack of luxury, whether that be through fur coats galore, seventy-dollar entrées at restaurants, and of course, triple-digit day passes to ski at the local resort. But what I found to be uniquely interesting about Jackson is that it is a land of pure fantasy. There is very little that ties it to the "normalcy" of the rest of the world. Sure, there are two chain grocery stores, a Target, a high school, a small hospital, but there is not a local college, or a stately town hall, or anything to tether it to the realistic on goings of an actual town. Because in reality, who needs to study at a local college when one is only there a few months out of the year, or working temporarily as a seasonal fly-fishing guide? There is a palpable sense of transiency, both for the elites purchasing a large home to only live at for certain periods of time, and for the adventure-seeking seasonal workers such as myself. Like myself, many of my friends I met working and living there have moved on. They find themselves elsewhere now, as their intention of coming to Jackson in the first place was to only work and live there for a short stint before heading off to other destinations to fuel their passion(s) to snowboard, raft, and rock climb, among other activities.

The local economy of Jackson Hole is buoyed not only by the transient nature of the proletariat but *also* the bourgeois ruling class, to use Marxist terminology. Specifically, the luxurious amenities such as upscale restaurants, five-star hotels, and one-on-one ski lessons with private instructors cannot exist without the proletariat seasonal workers who are willing to be waitresses, bartenders, and ski instructors catering to the bourgeois. Simultaneously, these proletariat jobs can only exist because of the demand of such by the bourgeois. Both groups rely on each other in order to function. The bourgeois relies on the proletariat to fulfill the need to have a service economy that caters to them in luxurious and exclusive ways. The proletariat relies on the demand by bourgeois for this hospitality to make enough income to fund their lifestyles. The desire for luxury supports both the bourgeois *and* the proletariat in a community like Jackson Hole.

It should be noted as well that many of the restaurants, shops, and cafes must provide housing for their employees to attract and maintain a workforce. I received a shared room above the restaurant I worked at for about three-hundred-dollars that came out of my monthly paycheck. This was not an uncommon occurrence. It is typical for ski resorts and remote commercial destinations of the like to provide housing for their workforce. But it is quite unique, in my opinion, for a coffee shop on the main street in Jackson to need to provide such a commodity to ensure employable people because housing in the area is so unaffordable. Like many places across the globe, there is a housing shortage in Jackson, but here there lies a whole other layer of precarity when your boss is also your landlord, and your coworkers are your roommates. As someone who grew up in a traditional small town on the East Coast with majority full-time residents, a stately town hall, an elected first selectman, and long-standing stores and restaurants, the fleetingness of Jackson was hard for me to comprehend at first. I could never imagine demanding lodging accommodations for any of the cafes or shops on the main street in my hometown. The lifestyle of a wealthy mountain resort town can be hard to pin down, but if one thing is for sure, it is that precarity is just the way of life.

This precarity highlights how a rugged mountain town can become a hotbed for concentrated wealth, and the ways in nature *itself* acts as a bargaining chip for said wealthy individuals to leverage their own fortunes through supposedly nature-based charitable acts. The pieces of this puzzle must line up just right for all of this to take place. The on goings of Jackson Hole can be seen through Marx's base-superstructure model in three different ways that build upon each other. First, the lax tax code Propst mentions above can act as the base, as it allows the wealthy to take advantage of such, only in turn to accumulate more wealth for themselves. This mass amount of wealth accumulation then attracts wealthy individuals to purchase property in the area, affecting the economy of the community for it to exist as an enclave for said wealthy individuals. Second, the abundance of nature allows the wealthy to create and participate in charities, which stimulate economic flows, even if these flows are just between wealthy individual and wealthy individual as seen through the aforementioned land-trust example. Third, the luxury hotels, spas, and ski resorts that have been created here to cater to the wealthy attract young, adventure-seeking seasonal workers as the workforce, even if that is only for a seasonal stint or two. The elite person's desire for a luxe meal or personal ski instructor bolster *both* the bourgeois and the proletariat communities. These three examples show how a wealthy vacation community such as Jackson can continue to operate in fickle economic terms that are so fundamentally reliant on the nature that surrounds it, making this a unique use-value exchange.

This exchange again proves how "bountiful" and "pristine" nature can itself be a driving force in the economic results I have analyzed above. It was noted above the fragile relationship between the Earth itself and its natural resources in relation to the mining/industry boom town model. In many ways, this model is still intact. Two major factors are reliant on one another and work in a cyclical nature to function. Wealthy elites use nature around them to create prosperity and economic wealth for themselves. This did not stop once the mines in places like Elkhorn and Bannack shuttered, it just looks a bit different today. Although Jackson is not, and has never been home to an extractive economy like the one in Butte, Montana. In Jackson, a different kind of extraction is taking place, particularly for the wealthy. Instead of getting rich off of something in the ground, the wealthy are building second, third, fourth homes in and around the Tetons, which in its own right, is “mining” the land, so to speak. This too is a form of physical extraction, not that dissimilar to a full-fledged mining operation.

Furthermore, extraction processes continue as these types of people extract the natural beauty of the land to use as a leveraging force to cloak their own motives to continue to gain economic wealth, whether that be through accumulation of private property (buying a vacation home or rental for finite periods of time) or through using nature-based private charities to participate in said accumulation. Jackson Hole’s present-day economy is one that utilizes the surrounding areas' spectacular surroundings to create an exclusive community where the surrounding nature itself is used as a tool to accumulate even more wealth - something that is, in my opinion, unique to the American West.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NEW WEST - BIG SKY, MONTANA

A forty-minute drive from Bozeman lies Big Sky, Montana. Big Sky is home to a popular ski resort, many shops, restaurants, and of course picturesque natural beauty. Big Sky's town center is a small area right off the main street that eventually leads to the resort itself. However, this quaint town center is one that is untraditional in the fact that it is managed and operated by a private equity group, instead of a traditional small-town government. An article from *Harper's Magazine* titled, "Slippery Slope: How Private Equity Affects a Ski Town," highlights how Big Finance can make its way to a ski town such as Big Sky. Author Nick Bowlin notes that in 2009, Boston-based private equity firm CrossHarbor purchased the Yellowstone Club and the two other luxury clubs in Big Sky through its "development arm" called Lone Mountain. In 2022, Lone Mountain purchased all the land in Big Sky's Town Center area, which made Lone Mountain the head of the "Town Center Owners Association". Bowlin excellently highlights how because Lone Mountain is head of this association, *they* are now responsible for tasks such as "maintaining streetlights," and "plowing roads" in the Town Center. The article sums up this point by saying, "The future of vacant lots or roads placement: these decisions are now influenced by Lone Mountain and CrossHarbor."[26] If one were to venture to Big Sky today, one would see what appears to be a quintessential downtown area, e.g., tidy sidewalks, boutiques, a small grocery store, etc. See below:

[26] Nick Bowlin, "Slippery Slope: How Private Equity Affects a Ski Town," *Harper's Magazine*, April 23, 2024, https://harpers.org/archive/2024/05/slippery-slope-nick-bowlin-big-sky-montana-ski-town-private-equity.

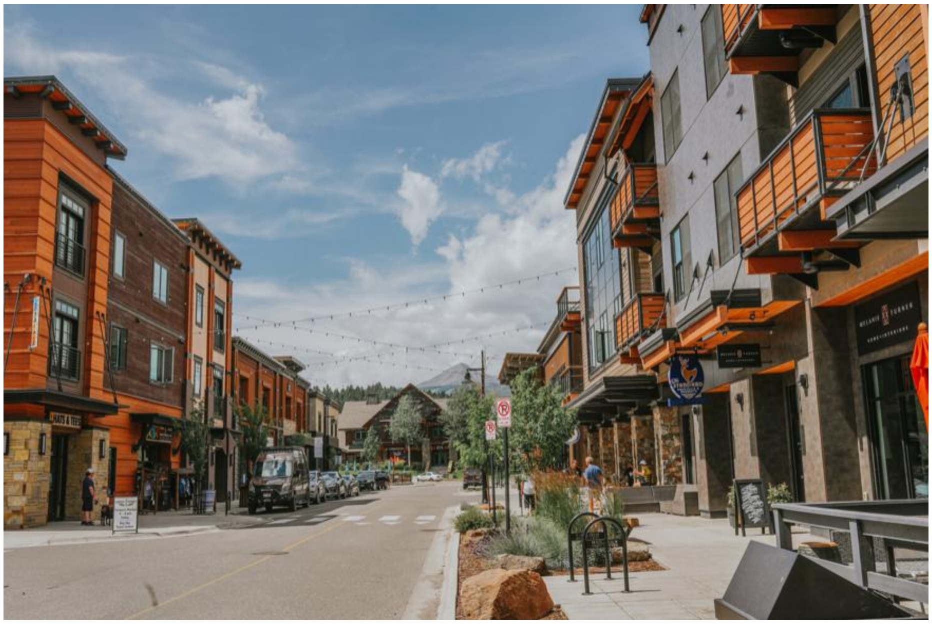

Figure 8. Big Sky's Town Center

At first glance, downtown Big Sky could be Anytown, USA, but the catch is that the streets are not being plowed by local government workers, nor is the garbage getting taken out by state sanitation workers. Instead, a privately held company is performing these basic tasks. Big Sky's town center's takeover by Lone Mountain is yet another key example of cloaking the true nature of their goal, which is clearly to have total control over a profitable area without any pesky government interference. Lone Mountain has built and actively maintains an area they have designed to appear to be a picture-perfect functioning town, all the while being under complete control of private equity. Harkening back to Trotsky's words above, if the main goal of capital accumulation is to conceal true motives of amassing more and more capital, then Lone Mountain is doing just that with its creation and takeover of the Town Center.

Political theorist Wendy Brown discusses the perils of neoliberalism, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. In the beginning of the section titled, "Neoliberalism in the Age of Financialization and Governance," she asks readers to "consider" the features of contemporary neoliberalism that are relevant today. She writes, "The marketization and outsourcing of the state… and the financialization of the state itself, which together makes the state supremely vulnerable to the movements of finance capital."[27] The "change" that Brown writes about here, i.e., the marketization and outsourcing of the State perfectly describes Big Sky's new reality. There is no need for a State-sanctioned fleet of snowplows and their drivers, when this could all be outsourced by Lone Mountain. The second half of this quote also speaks to a plight that is now plaguing Big Sky as a whole. Now, Big Sky is "vulnerable to the movements of finance capital". These private investors and private equity types will continue to take advantage of wild places such as Big Sky and build more and more Town Center-like places. Big Sky continues to be vulnerable to the cyclical nature of capitalism through Lone Mountain and its counterparts.

The financial industry clearly plays a pivotal role in the ways that capital is amassed in the present day. Using Brown's analysis, one can see how the financial industry (which CrossHarbor and Lone Mountain are very much a part of) can distort and manipulate a literal "town" in order to fit *their* desires, without any sort of government restraint. This is all done in a somewhat deceptive way as the Town Center looks like it could be any main street in any town that would be otherwise managed by a local government. This manipulation could be erected in the first place because of the lack of incorporation of Big Sky, but also the tendency in the contemporary American capitalist landscape to hide said true motives.

[27] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Zone Books, 2015), 71.

Ambiguity, Big Sky Style

Around the perimeter of Big Sky's Town Center lies the manicured streets that connect various single-family housing and condo developments. These houses and condos are not cheap and often act as vacation rentals. I came across a real estate listing page at a local Bozeman coffee shop not too long ago highlighting recent listings as well as interviews with Big Sky real estate agents. It was amusing to ogle at the high price tags of these luxury properties, but the ways that the interviewed real estate agents themselves talk about their advertised market was interesting in their own right.

In a two-page spread interviewing local real estate agents for the Bozeman/Big Sky area is a quote from a local real estate agent. In response to why he "loves the real estate industry," he says, "And obviously, the price points that we're at, they are folks who are very successful in business. It's very interesting to see the different industries that folks are involved with." This part of the real estate agent's interview notes how language can be codified to deflect. Instead of blatantly stating something along the lines of "rich people who are buying second, third, fourth homes are my clients," they use the phrase, "the price points we're at," which is ambiguous. This is on purpose on his part in my opinion, whether this was conscious on his behalf or not. It is important to note the "price points" in question.

The second sentence of the quote, where he notes that his clients are those who are "successful in business" is also equally ambiguous and murky. What kinds of business? Businesses in the United States? This remains unknown, or as Trotsky would say, "hidden." Secondly, the word "successful" is a naturally subjective term. Success could look different to me than it does with this specific real estate agent. Again, these turns of phrases chosen in this interview may seem miniscule, but I hope to show that the purposeful vagueness in language here is a mere cover for the amassing of wealth (in this case acquiring private property-based assets) occurring in a community such as this one.[28] As mentioned thus far, the physical components of Big Sky embody the vernacular of the modern hyper-capitalist environment with private equity in the helm, as a whole downtown area is now in their control. The same can be true in the ways that the actual dwellings in Big Sky are spoken about as well. It should be noted that the magazine this interview was in is titled *Big Sky Views*, and is operated by Outlaw Partners, which is the real estate company in charge of these holdings, and the employer of this real estate agent. The vagueness of this interview speaks to how words themselves can alter perception of wealth accumulation.

This vagueness also speaks to how language itself surrounding wealth can be used as a shield to deflect from mass wealth accumulation. This ambiguous language featured in the above article is not that different from the analysis Justin Farrell provides in relation to wealthy Jacksonites using charity work to leverage growing fortunes. In both examples, language is codified to conceal potential true intentions. Secondly, the creation of a literal town all to be under the helm of a Boston-based private equity firm could also be categorized as misleading and potentially disingenuous. However, these examples reiterate the need for capitalism to adapt to driving situational forces. The picturesque nature surrounding Big Sky, and the activities that come along with such (skiing, hiking, rock climbing, etc.), allow desire to be in such a place to

[28] To be clear, I do not want my analysis of the contents of this magazine to be negative, but instead as a fair criticism. To "hide" something regarding money may be for legal purposes, or a simple marketing tactic in this instance. The point of this project is not to shame people in my community, or to defame Bozeman/Big Sky as something it is not. I find the change around me to be fascinating, and one that should be adequately observed and measured. This analysis I am performing here will act as a lens to perform cultural critique within this rapidly changing environment.

increase. Once this desire or demand increases, so does the demand to take hold of such a place, and the cycles of capitalism persist.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NEW WEST - COLORADO

Lone Mountain and CrossHarbor are not the only private equity conglomerate to purchase stakes in the American West as they have already done in Big Sky. A 2021 article from the *Colorado Sun* titled, “Mark Walter, Who Owns the Los Angeles Dodgers, is buying up Crested Butte’s Downtown Buildings,” details how “billionaire investor” Mark Walter, a part-time resident of Crested Butte, Colorado, has taken the initiative to purchase several commercial buildings in Crested Butte’s downtown area, including several restaurants that have been in existence since the town’s founding in the late nineteenth-century. The article cites Walter and his investment group as having also acquired the nearby Almont Resort, which offers fishing trips, lodging and dining, and has been in existence since 1893. Walter and company allegedly have plans to erect “hotels and homes” to be built there. It explicitly cites that the purchase of the Almont Resort, “ranks as the largest project ever greenlighted by Crested Butte.”[29] The acquisition of downtown Crested Butte and the Almont Resort are very similar to the on goings in Big Sky. However, the difference here is that Crested Butte is an already existing town, whereas Big Sky was only developmentally flushed out within the past twenty years or so. But similar sentiments to privatize a specific area at all costs remain the same, greatly altering the economic and cultural landscape of Crested Butte.

[29] Jason Blevins, “Mark Walter, Who Owns the Los Angeles Dodgers, is Buying Up Crested Butte’s Downtown Buildings,” *The Colorado Sun,* April 9, 2021.

Crested Butte is home to the Crested Butte Mountain Resort, owned by the massive outdoor sporting conglomerate, Vail Resorts. Much like Big Sky's Town Center's proximity to the Big Sky Resort, the town Crested Butte's proximity to their own respective resort should not be seen as a coincidence in the context of this analysis I present here. These entities in the town of Crested Butte are now being transferred to the private hands of Walter and his coworkers, circumventing government oversight. No government oversight known. The deregulation of Crested Butte is very much in line with the business plan of Big Sky's Town Center. The proximity to nature, in this case, ideal ski slopes, acts as a driving force for expansion and growth, as more people will continue to flock to this ski town to utilize these amenities. In turn, private financiers will leverage this population to, in turn, privatize more of these destinations.

The Zoomtown Comes to Colorado

To the east of Crested Butte lies Telluride, Colorado, another point in the Rocky Mountains that is also home to a ski resort and a myriad of natural wonders. However, many of the same dilemmas plague Telluride, showing that these occurrences are not unique to Montana or Wyoming. In the essay, "Shelter for the People," author Joan May speaks to the housing shortage plaguing this community post-pandemic. She notes the town was, "transformed at an accelerated pace by a COVID-19 driven mass exodus by remote workers who can afford to live wherever they want." Secondly, he importantly notes that many "Gen Zers" flocked to the area seeking a "more outdoorsy, small-town lifestyle". This new type of unfettered capitalism is not exclusive to Montana, but in fact, expanding to reach many states in the Mountain West. May's analysis of newcomers to Telluride mirrors similar sentiments of the people migrating to Bozeman - those seeking a more outdoors, or nature-based lifestyle. May notes how this influx of residents has greatly altered the housing market, making housing for many increasingly expensive, and therefore nearly unaffordable for most. This echoes the increased number of unhoused people in the Bozeman example. Lastly, May concludes this section by touching upon a newfound extractive economy due to this increase in population by writing, “Houses are remodeled or built new, resulting in bigger, fancier homes that require lots of work to build, renovate, and maintain.”[30] Clearly, the post-pandemic era Telluride has seen many such changes that are certainly not exclusive to just this area.

May’s analysis is on par with that in which I have presented via two modalities. One, he notes how a new extractive economy is taking root - the need to build new, better, exquisite homes. This is a clear effect of not only population increase, but the different types of capital that are newly entering this community that they had maybe not seen before. This ultimately results in the creation of such housing. Two, he notes that during the pandemic, many people relocated to Telluride to seek a more “outdoors lifestyle”. This desire to seek this specific type of lifestyle (while subsequently potentially displacing already existing residents) is on par with reasons as to why many have flocked to the Mountain West. This recreation is clearly a huge draw for people, as May notes through her specifically pointing to this trait concerning why gen-zers and the like were choosing to relocate. However, it is clear that this movement solely based on a lifestyle is affecting housing and overall stability in places like Telluride and Bozeman. This influx of new people to a specific area greatly shifts economic flows. But the desperation to flee city life for a more rural lifestyle can easily mask these economic shifts. I will admit that when I moved to

[30] Joan May, “Shelter For the People, In Telluride, Community Suffers without Adequate Housing,” in *A Watershed Moment, The American West in the Age of Limits*, ed. Robert Frodeman, Evelyn Brister, and Luther Propst (University of Utah Press, 2024), 108-109.

Jackson Hole and then Bozeman from Brooklyn, New York during the pandemic, I was not thinking of how the established capital I was bringing with me from an urban area could affect the already existing residents of these communities. I simply wanted an out of pandemic-era shutdown in New York City that resulted in me losing my corporate job and succumbing to debt. I am certainly not alone in this instance. I have met many people in Bozeman across all ages and financial statuses that echo this sentiment. Although these intentions are not “hidden” as Trotsky would say, said intentions have underlying effects which subsequently affect the economic occurrences in these communities.

The pandemic allowed for a mass exodus into these rural spaces, which ultimately speaks to how capitalism takes place in ways that are never permanent, even if they may appear to be on the surface. As Marx noted above, capitalism functions in a circuit-like form, always ebbing and flowing to adapt to the forces at hand. In this example, one could identify the woes of the pandemic as a “cause” to jumpstart this circuit. The circuit then continues to take shape in that new capital that is brought to such a place as Telluride. In turn, the already existing residents struggle with important needs such as housing, while simultaneously, the people with already existing capital are building these luxe new homes. Clearly, the capitalist system in current form continues to act as a cycle, or what Marx deems as a “circuit”. It appears there is no definitive end point and start point. Certainly, this circuit-like formation is not exclusive to towns like Bozeman and Telluride, but in the context of these once-sleepy small Mountain West towns, it has long-lasting aftereffects.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NEW WEST - THE YELLOWSTONE CLUB

Thus far, I have analyzed how capital flows have greatly altered communities in Wyoming, Colorado and Montana. In Montana specifically, I have identified how private equity has taken hold of an entire "town" via Big Sky's Town Center. But other occurrences are taking form in the Big Sky area, most notably, the exclusive Yellowstone Club - a place where the ultra-elite can dine, live, and of course, ski. Known residents of the Yellowstone Club are Bill Gates, Justin Timberlake, and Tom Brady. The Yellowstone Club, however, is different from an average country club because of the secrecy and elitism that shrouds it, attracting high-caliber clientele. The specific clientele that has existed in the context of the club since its origin proves that it has always been a place for wealthy celebrities, which continues to persist.

According to official Yellowstone Club marketing materials, the club was founded in 1997 by "lumber baron" Tim Blixseth. Early in its inception, Blixseth recruited high profile members of society, such as politician Jack Kemp and cyclist Greg Lemond to attract new members. It is importantly noted that in 2008, the club found itself bankrupt, just for Sam Byrne, a financier at CrossHarbor capital, to buy out the club, rescuing it from its once-impending demise. For context, CrossHarbor operates the aforementioned Lone Mountain Capital I mentioned in the above section about Big Sky's Town Center. Not only does physical proximity link the town of Big Sky to the Yellowstone Club, but the same Big Finance firm does as well. From its initial creation, the Yellowstone Club has always reeled in elite celebrities. Its second iteration in 2008 cements its standing with private equity, all in all, making this an exclusive club to be a part of.

The Yellowstone Club has established itself as a private sanctuary where ultra-elite members of society can toil away shrouded in secrecy. It should be noted that yearly dues for the club are nearly $46,000, in addition to the $300,000 membership deposit. Those numbers are not including the prices to live in the actual club itself, which start at four-million-dollars for a condo, according to the same promotional material cited above.[31] Previously noted author Justin Farrell of *Billionaire Wilderness* notes the privacy of the club in general, with specific features such as a private cordoned off area of the mountain designated to members-only skiing, and how this is a huge selling point for the club members. He culminates these interviews as, "more generally, the culture of ultra-wealth privacy in this case fundamentally alters the relationship between the American people and access to gilded lands like these."[32] The immense importance of privacy seems to be a key motivating factor in the club's reputation. The desire for such privacy is directly on par with the words of Trotsky. The capitalist will do nearly anything to "hide" wealth concentration. In this case, that would be paying upwards of nearly $350,000 to ski, dine, and live in privacy, away from the everyman. The remaining portion of Farrell's quote in regards to the relationship between the American people and "gilded lands" such as those in Big Sky, speak to how this "hiding" becomes actualized. The desire to hide the amassed capital by noted capitalists could be stated as the motivating factor for the Yellowstone Club's existence. Because of this desire, the ultra-elite Yellowstone Club-ers are creating an environment where the general public does not have access to this "gilded land," as Farrell refers to it. Wealthy individuals are thus leveraging their own wealth to gain access and subsequently retain access to

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[31] "Mountain Paradise," *The Yellowstone Club*, accessed March 1, 2025, https://yellowstoneclub.com/images/CoveyRise-YC-Aug_Sept.pdf.
[32] Justin Farrell, *Billionaire Wilderness: The Ultra-Wealthy and the Remaking of the American West*, (Princeton University Press, 2020), 74.

picturesque mountain landscapes to fulfill their own personal desires. The taking of these lands is reminiscent of the days of robber-barons taking land for themselves and profiting from them. Again, this comparison between robber-barons and Yellowstone Club members speaks to how the Old West and the New West are not that different, and continue to operate in this repeating, cyclical format.

The Yellowstone Club Legacy Continues

However, the Yellowstone Club is not the only private enclave where such individuals can revel in excess. A recent *New York Magazine* article titled, "To Buy A Mountain Range," illustrates current on goings in the Crazy Mountain Range, which sits Northeast of Big Sky. Author Ben Ryder Howe discusses the potential expansion of Yellowstone Club-like spaces within this segment of the mountains in the form of a land swap with the Nation Forest Service. Howe speaks to this increasing trend of privatizing once public land. He writes that "investors buy up a valley or mountain, fence it off, shoo away the public, and charge rates only the wealthy can afford." Howe sharply describes this privatization process, which is similar to the business model of the Yellowstone Club. He continues to expand on how this phenomenon is almost unique to Montana, "Nowhere is this more in evidence than Montana, where former livestock ranches across the state have been converted into fishing and hunting clubs."[33] Howe picks up on how in the past, this area was once used for the livestock business, a profitable stream of income turned capital. Now, these ranches have been bought up and are now used as private outdoor recreation hubs for "fishing and hunting clubs." The process of cyclical economic structures yet

[33] Ben Ryder Howe, "To Buy A Mountain Range," *New York Magazine*, October 23, 2024. https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/yellowstone-club-real-estate-public-land-montana-crazy-mountains.html.

again takes shape. Once a site of industry, the livestock ranch ceases to exist, ending a specific type of revenue stream. But the profitability of the land is now being brought back to life in a different form. However, as Howe accurately notes, this is no longer for the public's consumption, but instead acts as a playground for the wealthy to hunt, fish, and ski.

The transformation from once-public land to now private is one that is exclusionary to everyone else but the owner them self. I will refrain from investigating further the technicalities of the land swap itself described in this article, for it is not necessarily adherent to the crux of this essay. Instead, I hope to prove that Howe brings into view important points concerning how this trend of privatization is on par with what has already been happening, particularly with the creation of the Yellowstone Club. Theorist Erich Fromm analyzes the origin of private property in his book, *To Have or To Be?* He notes that the term "private property" is derived from the Latin, "privare" in English meaning "to deprive one of." He further explains that private property makes its owners the "sole masters, with full power to deprive others of its use or enjoyment." He also importantly brings to light that modern society "rests" on private property and profit.[34] Fromm highlights the crude reality that defines private property - the subsequent deprivation of such from the non-owners. His analysis of the origins of the word itself speaks to how ingratiated the idea of private property is in society. The origin of private property presents itself in modern times as cordoning off pristine lands for the pleasure of the ruling class. This is what has, and will continue, to define the New American West.

This *New York Magazine* article was written in October of 2024. In January of 2025, the *Montana Free Press* reported that the US Forest Service did in fact authorize the swap.

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[34] Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, (Bloomsbury Academic 2012), 59.

Inevitably, there are strong feelings to be had by Montanans criticizing the swap. *Montana Free Press'* article notes a quote by John Sullivan, a member of the Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers group. Sullivan says, "'We are deeply disappointed that the Forest Service has caved to big money and their never-ending goal to lock the public out of public land.'"[35] Sullivan's sentiments about "big money" pushing the public out of public land is what I wish to bring about further. The urge of the wealthy to do what they please with Montana public land operates in tandem with what I analyzed through places like the Yellowstone Club, Big Sky or even Jackson Hole. Not only will elites purchase property in these areas, but they will also work to cordon off said property to create an exclusive members-only space. Returning yet again to Trotsky, one can see how capitalists will do anything to hide their wealth and perpetual capital accumulation, even if that means buying up a mountain range.

[35] Amanda Eggert, "Forest Service authorizes controversial land swap along the Eastern portion of the Crazy Mountains," *Montana Free Press*, January 20, 2025. https://montanafreepress.org/2025/01/20/forest-service-authorizes-controversial-crazy-mountains-land-swap/.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Much can be said about the construction (and destruction) of aesthetics for capital gain and loss. Theorist Walter Benjamin wrote extensively about this in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". He writes, "Humanity's self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."[36] His words encapsulate how humans can so easily experience their destruction as an aesthetic pleasure. The correlation between self-inflicted destruction and aesthetic pleasure above all else can also adequately describe the relationship between the aesthetic and economic in the American West. His words aptly correlate to the base-superstructure model. The "self-alienation" could be mapped onto the feelings of temporariness that defines both the Old and New West – i.e., constantly moving to chase the potential to strike it big on a newly-discovered oil field, or in a copper mine. One is choosing to move away from everything that they had previously known to embark on this journey, resulting in alienation all for the purpose of riches that were not promised. The aftereffects of such a move resulted in the changing of aesthetics. As noted previously, whole towns and cities were constructed to accommodate the workers seeking these boomtown fortunes. The boomtown itself, and the new aesthetics it is subsequently creating, could operate in the "destruction of aesthetics", and therefore as the superstructure. Untouched, wide-open spaces in the American West have been destroyed (and continue to be so) for the sake of creating the boomtown/zoomtown. Benjamin's words can be applicable to this New/Old West

[36] Walter Benjamin and Peter Demetz, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, 1st ed, trans. Harry Zohn (Harcourt, 1978), 42.

paradigm in conjunction with the base-superstructure schema. The boomtown model defines the economic-driven base, and in turn, aesthetics are both created and destroyed. This model has defined both the Old and New West, which adheres to the ultimate cyclical nature of this region's economic and aesthetic principles.

Thus far, I have analyzed multiple ways in which nature and the idea of American West itself has acted as leveraging tools for both the bourgeois and the proletariat. In the beginning of this essay, I laid out the foundation for the Old West to flourish, both in terms of reality and fantasy. In reality, the Old West was dependent on extractive economies such as the mining or timber industries. These industries operated in oftentimes lawless lands, when what are now known as states were then just territories. The onslaught of gold rushes and the like drove workers West - individuals seeking both the sense of adventure and potential fortune. These new workers needed somewhere to call home, and then suddenly, whole towns cropped up around the natural resource extraction site, solidifying Marx's base-superstructure model. Boom towns could only exist because of these extractive economies, which show the dependent nature of capitalism - there cannot be a superstructure (in this case a boomtown and all that comes along with it), without a base of natural resource cultivation. The temporary nature of these boomtowns did not offer much stability, but they did allow for the Wild West to arise through this instability and precarity. This was a far cry from a stable and rigid life back in already-formed cities and economies back East. In conclusion, the real Old West gave rise to the largely fictional Wild West, the one that is still to this day depicted in countless songs, literature, and film. Some contemporary scholars argue that the idea of the American West is a fantasy, and while I do not necessarily disagree, it should be noted that the idea of fleeting adventure and insatiable appetites for natural resource wealth was (and continues to be) very real, defining the creation (and re-creation) of the Old West, in turn for the New West. The Old West and New West paradigms themselves can function within the realm of the base-superstructure model. The Old West acts as the base, setting the groundwork for the New West to be a full-fledged superstructure. Clearly, the New West could not exist without the foundation of the Old West that was, and continues to be, reliant on the boom-town model and the model's ability to accumulate capital.

In my musings on the New West, I present how extractive economies that defined the Old West have been recycled into new, just as equally extractive economies in the New West. In the context of Bozeman and Telluride, population growth has once again fueled a new extractive economy - construction for new (or remodeled) houses for newcomers, whether these houses act as permanent residences, or vacation pieds-à-terre. In both the context of the Old and New Wests, these extractive economies are cemented in nature. In the Old West, natural resource extraction was the source from which these boom towns were created. In the New West, these boom towns have been reincarnated into zoom towns, once again attracting more people, overall increasing the population. Both examples of population growth are reliant on nature as a gravitating and driving force. However, in the Old West, nature was seen as a mode of necessity. Particularly, the necessity to extract from the Earth, which in turn provided a new economy. Differently, in the New West, nature acted as a reprieve for people fleeing city life, particularly during the throws of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the motives have varied for this population growth, the Earth itself, and the nature it naturally provides, was the driving reason for this relocation.

The dependence on nature in both of these instances speaks to the cyclical nature of capitalism. Even if boomtowns went bust long ago, years later, they can be reincarnated as a tourist hub, fueling another sort of extractive economy that is not so different from that of times past. In sum, I identified key ways in which economics bolsters this flowing circuit - never fully going away, but instead constantly being reinvented to suit the whims of capitalism at any given time. This constant reinvention remains to be the hallmark of capitalism development within both the Old and New West.

The idea of both old and new extractive economies clearly defines the Old and New West. But this argument can be taken one step further in the context of how these circuit-like formations are represented through *both* aesthetics and actual vernacular. Aesthetic components could be seen through the creation of Big Sky's Town Center, where Anytown, USA has been rectified through the Lone Mountain private equity group. The picturesque aesthetic of a small-town main street is now under complete control of Big Finance, creating a new facet of deception. The vernacular surrounding capital accumulation in the New West can be seen through luxe locales such as Jackson Hole, the Yellowstone Club, and in the Crazy Mountains, and how these places are spoken about. In Jackson Hole, the base-superstructure model can be mapped onto both the proletariat and bourgeois classes, with "pristine" nature being the base driving force for capital accumulation in both groups. The transiency of a seasonal workforce can only exist because of the nature that surrounds the area, a clear draw for adventure-seeking workers to fulfill their outdoor passions. The wealthy elite cannot exist in Jackson without the workforce of baristas, servers, and outdoor guides. The proletariat class cannot function without the desire of the elites to be able to have private ski lessons, expensive five-course meals, and pristine living accommodations. Jackson's economy is dependent on the nature that surrounds it, much like the other places I have mentioned thus far. However, the habits of wealthy Jacksonites can be analyzed further with how they accumulate wealth, and then subsequently discuss this wealth. They have taken a liking to performing “charity” work under the guise of protecting the local environment. By doing so, their mass of wealth is deflected, and their benevolence instead is at the forefront. The bourgeois class in this case utilize nature as a leveraging tool to ultimately line their own pockets. This added layer that lies in the vernacular is on par with Trotsky’s notion of the capitalist doing everything in their power to hide this accumulation. Jackson falls in line with how the New West has been sought out and cultivated into what it is today. What makes it somewhat unique is how the wealthy ruling class use the surrounding nature as a way to accumulate capital.

Lastly, I discuss the wealthy’s need to close off pristine natural wonders in the New West, as seen through both the Yellowstone Club and the acquisition of the Crazy Mountains. Again, these clubs can be seen through the base-superstructure model. The natural wonders within the Rocky Mountains are the driving force for the wealth to be drawn to these areas in order to ski, hunt, fish, etc., acting as the base. The superstructure is the creation of the club itself. Part of this superstructure involves this secrecy and exclusivity, as seen through the members-only model. The base-superstructure apparatus works together to not only provide economic analysis, but illustrates how the economic base can impact the ways that the superstructure manifests. This is on par with Trotsky’s analysis of hidden wealth accumulation. The established superstructure in the case of the Yellowstone Club then becomes hidden, as it is physically isolated, but also not open to the public to join. In comparison, Big Sky’s Town Center is about a twenty-minute drive from the perimeter of the Yellowstone Club. Even though the Town Center is steeped in its own sort of aesthetic deception via Lone Mountain’s management, it is an area that is open to the public - anyone can walk around the area regardless of monetary wealth, unlike the Yellowstone Club. The physical act of hiding oneself and one's wealth is a clear leveraging tool for the wealthy elite in the New West. Although the Yellowstone Club has been around for multiple decades at this point, the expansion of a Yellowstone Club-like space in the Crazies shows how this privatization will continue to be an unstoppable trend in this region.

The Future of the New West

I will conclude this thesis by predicting that the future of the New West lies in an "experience economy". The American West, New and Old, have always been sites of experience, where people can fulfill adventurous Wild West fantasies, whether that be with permanence or simply for the duration of a vacation. I would be remiss if I did not mention the television show *Yellowstone* and the effects it has had on the area it is supposed to depict. After the show's series finale in December of 2024, journalist Johnathan Hettinger wrote a poignant piece in "In These Times," about how the popularity of the show forced him to have to flee Park County, Montana, a place he loved, due to gentrification and rising housing costs - things he attributes directly to the show. He writes, "And I'll remember the damage it left behind: a Park County warped by gentrification, where an intact ecosystem has been commodified into a backdrop for cosplay and profit."[37] Hettinger's words speak to how quickly a specific community can change because of a beloved television show, book, song, whatever it may be. *Yellowstone* can also be viewed through the base-superstructure lens to which I have returned to time and time again in this

[37] Jonathan Hettinger, "The 'Yellowstone' TV Show is Over, but Not the Damage It's Done to the West," *In These Times*, December 25, 2024, https://inthesetimes.com/article/yellowstone-tv-show-finale-gentrification-development-west.

essay. The show itself acts as the base, creating a superstructure of recharged desire for a Wild Western lifestyle by many of its viewers, even if this desire is based on a fictional television show. This desire manifests through ills such as gentrification as Hettinger notes. His quote above speaks to the ramifications of the show's popularity in his own community, with these ramifications being so intense that he was forced to return to his Midwest hometown as he could not afford to live in the area. The plagues of the popularity of a fictional television show illustrate how the desire for a piece of the Wild West is still prevalent today. The extractive nature of the experience economy shows itself in real life predicaments. One being gentrification and the issues that arise out of such - displacement, homelessness, and soaring housing prices to name a few. This again shows the temporary nature of the modern capitalist landscape in the New West.

It seems as though the extractive economic model that defined the Old West never went away. Instead, it has just been repurposed time and time again, as seen through population booms in the early 2020's in a place like Bozeman. I am not sure what the future looks like for the various communities I have touched upon here. This goes to show the volatility of capital flows within these spaces. I myself will be relocating soon, as I will no longer be able to afford to live in Bozeman, despite my full-time job and the salary it provides. But if one thing remains the same, it is that the temporary that has always, and will continue, to define the American West will continue to live on.

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