RURAL GENTRIFICATION

by

Cynthia Matty-Huber

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ABSTRACT

Representations and studies of gentrification largely focus on its impact in urban centers. Urban gentrification brings change in an urban area associated with the movement of more affluent individuals into a lower-class area. However, rural gentrification has been overlooked in documentary representations of gentrification. Rural gentrification occurs when wealthier people buy property in ranch and working-class areas, driving up property values. Both contexts share the difficult paradox that gentrification brings money into the impacted area, but it often comes at the expense of poorer, pre-gentrification residents who cannot afford increased property costs or taxes. The mountainous west of the United States has been an area of intense development in recent decades and many aspects of its character have changed with shifting demographics as a result of rural gentrification. This thesis, titled "Rural Gentrification," examines the unique role of documentary film in demonstrating the impact of rural gentrification through the eyes of, John Hoiland, one of Montana's last independent ranchers, who is the subject of my film *For the Love of Land*. The film tells the story of finality, disappearance, and what it means to be the last of something in this rapidly-shifting terrain while bringing attention to that tragic position that these last remaining personalities of the old west find themselves in as the world around them changes. "Rural Gentrification" argues that there is an urgent need to create visual representations of the mountainous west of the United States using documentary film against this backdrop of rapid change. Using *For the Love of Land* as a case study, I trace the significance of observational cinema as a significant influence that informed the decision-making process and creation of the film.

INTRODUCTION

The successful observational filmmaker must perform a delicate balancing act between the twin priorities of documentation and storytelling. Like an anthropologist, they are seeking to capture life as it is with minimal direction or editing. At the same time, however the filmmaker must also convey relationships, meanings, and timelines through a realistic, but ultimately invisible, narrative (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009; Bernard, 2012). When balanced correctly, the resulting film provides both evidence and story that can generate conversation among the audience regarding issues, peoples, and events. Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor employed the techniques of this film style in portraying the lives of some of the last remaining cattle drivers in the American west in the documentary, *Sweetgrass* (2010). With no interviews and minimal dialogue, this film is a poignant example of how observational filmmaking can preserve both the images and essence of a rapidly disappearing culture.

The mountainous west of the United States has been an area of intense development in recent decades and many aspects of its character have changed with shifting demographics. Following the example of Barbash and Castaing-Taylor, I also chose to turn to observational film making to document an aspect of the old American west before it disappears. The subject of my film, *For the Love of Land,* is John Hoiland, an elderly and independent rancher seeking to protect his ancestral grazing land from future development. Mr. Hoiland is one of many longtime residents of the rural west being threatened by gentrification, the gradual migration of the wealthy from coastal cities to less developed housing markets in the western interior.

The aim of the paper to follow is to establish why I chose to document Mr. Hoiland's story and discuss the rationale behind the filming techniques I chose to do so. This analysis will

proceed in three discrete sections. The first will discuss the history and causes of the recent trend of rural gentrification in the American west. Following this section will be a discussion of observational documentary filmmaking and the balance it offers between storytelling and research. The final section will provide a synthesis of the first two by explaining how and why I used the different methods of observational filmmaking to document John Hoiland's life and struggle.

CHAPTER ONE

GENTRIFICATION OF THE RURAL WESTERN UNITED STATES

The mountainous west of the United States typically refers to the states of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Texas. These states share a natural character of large, open expanses of undeveloped land that have long attracted new residents from the more populous states of the northeast and California. The rural nature of this area has been preserved through a combination of land purchasing by the federal government and the traditional livelihoods of ranching and farming that have long occurred in the region. In terms of land ownership, the presence of the federal government in these states cannot be overstated. 85 percent of Nevada and 65 percent of Utah, for example, are federally owned land (Daly, 2018). This has prevented much of the wide scale development that has long been at work in urbanizing the populous states of the Eastern US. Furthermore, many of these federal lands are buffered on all sides by working farm or pastoral land (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011).

Ranching and farming were once among the dominant industries of the American west, alongside resource extraction and forestry (Abrams, et al, 2012). These agro-pastoral industries require large amounts of land, with many private ranches in Western states exceeding 400 acres (Gosnell & Travis, 2006). Sales of these large parcels of land have increasingly attracted wealthy, out-of-state buyers since the 1970's (Hert,1999). Formerly small cities adjacent to these rural areas, such as Missoula and Jackson, have also experienced population booms, with migration to these cities from the Northeast and Midwest increasing significantly over the past four decades (Census Bureau, 2019). This has had a gradual effect on the economy and demographics of the region. Perhaps the most visible change has been a shift in land usage.

Many ranches abutting federal properties have been transitioned from productive, agricultural use to passive, recreational uses by “absentee” owners (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011). New owners are more likely to be attracted to these lands for their scenic, recreational, or conservation potential rather than the grazing opportunities they offer. This has diminished the agro-pastoral industries in some areas of the west, but also transformed it in others. CNN founder, Ted Turner, is perhaps the most well-known face of this brand of gentrification. Turner began acquiring former ranches in the 1990s and has since amassed a collective holding of sixteen ranches in six western states. As he acquired these properties, Turner removed all barbed-wire fencing and transitioned the livestock from cattle to bison (*Bison bison*), an iconic bovine species of the American west that has long been a conservation concern. Turner has also used these properties to host environmental research and provide habitat for other threatened species (Wilkinson & Turner, 2013).

The example of Ted Turner is an extreme one. More common is a transition from largescale farming and ranching operations to smaller, sustainable and organic agricultural programs with new landowners (Abrams, et al, 2012). These changes have reduced the appeal of the rural west for commercial farmers and ranchers while also increasing amenities, such as outdoor recreation and ecotourism, that appeal to out-of-state visitors. In recent years, a relatively young, upper middleclass demographic has rushed to western cities to take advantage of these amenities, transforming once sleepy locations into booming metropolitan regions (Hines, 2009). Arriving with far greater economic resources than have previously been seen in these areas, this influx has raised the overall cost of living and displaced many longtime residents.

This has translated into a considerable demographic shift for many of these cities that cause them to standout in otherwise rural, conservative states. In the 2016 election, for example, the state of Wyoming voted overwhelmingly Republican except for Teton County, the state's most populous and active area, which voted heavily Democrat (New York Times, 2016). Such differences underly tensions between newcomers and longtime residents of these areas, both of whom seem to see each other as a cultural threat (Ghose, 2004). Though these younger, wealthier migrants to the mountainous west have been received with trepidation, many of them are themselves victims of another displacement event currently occurring, the California housing crisis.

With a population of nearly 40 million, California is, by far, the most populous state in the Western United States. The state's housing market, however, does not have nearly the capacity to provide for every eligible homeowner. Increasing demand for a slowly growing supply of homes has driven housing costs ever higher, to the degree that these price increases have even translated to the rental market. Over the past decade, this has caused mass migrations out of California, with over one million more people leaving the state than entering during this time period (California Public Policy Institute, 2018). Many of these people have followed the example established by Ted Turner and others in the 1990s and set their sights on states in the mountainous west that offer a lower cost of living and greater access to natural amenities.

As these people arrive in the metropolitan centers of western states in increasing numbers, the amenities that defined their standard of living in California have gradually migrated with them. This has included spas, high-end boutiques, and expensive restaurants that cater almost exclusively to newly established, ex-urban communities (Hert,1999). The influx of

affluent residents has also brought new demand for luxury apartments, condos, and similar multi-family units. Many growing western cities now feature chic apartment buildings once only found in metropolitan centers like Seattle and Los Angeles. This has brought another force in shifting land uses for the mountainous west as undeveloped land on the outskirts of cities has been transformed into new residential buildings and neighborhoods. In contrast to the environmentally beneficial work of Turner and similar ranch revivalists, this aspect of gentrification has driven development to encroach on once highly productive habitat, farmland, and park buffer land (Guide, et al, 2006).

The forces of gentrification have worked together over time to reshape the appearance, culture, and productivity of this region, giving rise to what many have called the “New American West.” Replacing the once formidable western frontier of open vistas and land usage, this new west is an amenity-rich haven for the displaced wealthy of California and the northeast. The location of these communities among the dramatic natural scenery for which the region is known has prompted critics to describe these new arrivals as engaging in “permanent tourism” (Hines, 2009). The growing popularity of Instagram, Tik-Tok, and similar social media platforms has provided a considerable volume of evidence that many have chosen to relocate to these states with the hopes of recreating images and experiences seen elsewhere. This is to say that, for many, the relocation to the mountainous west was motivated by the desire to produce long- term, touristic experiences (MacCannell, 2013).

It is against this hectic backdrop of multi-generational change, development, and displacement that the story of John Hoiland has gained interest in recent years. John was 93 years old during the filming of *For the Love of Land.* However, he previously appeared in two

documentary shorts, *Where Home Has Always Been* (2018) and *I Am Still Here* (2019), that I filmed with him when he was 90 and 91. As the son of Norwegian immigrants, John is a first-generation American, but a third-generation rancher. He inherited his ranch from his parents and has lived to become one of the few remaining independent ranchers of rural Montana. His story centers around his struggle to prevent the dividing and developing of his family's ranch upon his passing. I have come to see John's personality as a vestige of the old American west that is making one final stand against the overwhelming tide of gentrification washing over the region. Telling this story required a method of filmmaking that gave viewers as truthful of a look at John and his plight as possible while also helping them to see this unique man through my eyes. As such, I turned to several landmark films in observational cinema for inspiration.

CHAPTER TWO

OBSERVATIONAL DOCUMENTARIES AND THEIR METHODOLOGY

Observational film making walks a fine line between social science and visual storytelling. On the one hand, such films are clearly aimed at documenting evidence in much the same way Margaret Mead and other early anthropologists sought to use video footage as part of their ethnographic studies (McDougall, 1997). Extended scenes seek to capture events in “lived time” and directors are encouraged to make themselves as invisible to the audience as possible. On the other hand, however, the aim of the observational film maker is not to present a detached, scientific view of events, but rather to present the viewpoint of someone that has a relationship with the subject of the documentary (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). As such, narrative is also a crucial aspect of this style of film making.

To avoid imposing a forced narrative on documentary subjects, observational filmmakers often turn to the personal relationships and opinions of subjects they develop while filming. Imbuing the final film with this personally conceived narrative allows the filmmaker to influence the meaning viewers take away from the film and challenge any pre-conceived notions they may have about the documentary subject. Though the use of voice-overs and similar devices are common in other genres of documentary, the narrative of an observational documentary must arise entirely from the visual chronology presented in the film (Bernard, 2012). This technique was used to powerful effect by Albert and David Maysles in their landmark documentary, *Grey Gardens* (1975).

Now considered a masterpiece of the observational documentary genre, *Grey Gardens* presents a short period of time in the lives of Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale (aka “Big Edie”) and

her daughter, Edith Bouvier Beale (aka "Little Edie"). Filming took place shortly after the mother and daughter gained widespread media attention for nearly being evicted from their Long Island mansion due to disrepair and unsanitary conditions. The relationship between these two women and their home, as well as their relationship to the film makers and the outside world, is portrayed entirely through footage curated and assembled by the directors. Without personally experiencing the women at the center of the film, it is impossible to say how much the Maysles "created" characters through selective editing; however, each woman provides a crucial plot device for the overall narrative.

Big Edie, an elderly and secluded woman in the film, was once a singer and stage performer aspiring for fame. Her connection to the present reality around her is portrayed as tenuous through focal scenes that often show her lost in reminiscence about her glory days. These sentimental recollections are punctuated by the commentary of her daughter, who is at various times shown both adoring and resenting her mother's influence on her life. Little Edie is also a former performer pre-occupied with nostalgia; however, her character is more defined by the seemingly delusional hope of someday returning to the public eye. When not describing her life with her mother, Little Edie is typically focused on either her sense of fashion, which was considered outlandish for the time, or on previously squandered opportunities for fame and glory. Both mother and daughter bear many similarities to each other, however the difference in their age provides possibly the greatest contrast. While Big Edie has been somewhat subdued by old age, Little Edie moves and speaks at an almost manic pace.

The personalities of both women depict a very secluded and unique world that exists entirely within the grounds of their estate. This image is completed by the occasional filming of

interactions between the two Edies and various contractors that come to repair their home. Though these visitors always make clear that they are there to work, they are inevitably pulled into the strange world of the two women, who extend their reminiscing and arguments to outsiders as if they had been in the film all along. These scenes also depict the continuing delusions of aristocracy shared by the two women despite the squalor of their living conditions. At one point, Little Edie states that, though she finds one young contractor to be pleasant, she is tired of his frequent visits to their home. In this scene, it is made very clear that both women still see the blue-collar middle class of Long Island as being lesser than.

Together, these scenes form a gradual narrative that is both chronological and non-chronological. Visually, the film begins with images of articles describing the near eviction of the two Edies and proceeds to show the women in the aftermath of this very public scandal. The characters themselves, however, tell a story that effortlessly moves backwards and forwards in time, often emphasized by black-and-white still images of their posh history which contrast greatly with the moving images of the women in their decrepit home (Robson, 1983). An influential presence throughout the narrative is that of the Maysles, who only appear on screen occasionally, but have a clear influence on the behavior of their subjects. Both Edies are clearly eager to impress the directors and vie for the camera’s attention when both women are present. A notable example of this occurs when Little Edie aggressively snatches at an old wedding photo that Big Edie is trying to conceal from the directors, ripping the photo’s protective folder in the process. Such scenes add the context of a loving, but sometimes cantankerous relationship between mother and daughter.

Further emphasizing the developing relationship between director and subject, no formal interviews are conducted, but rather informal moments of personal conversation are captured instead. This occurs most often with Little Edie who candidly shares her thoughts on many topics while clearly making eye contact with one of the directors off screen and even occasionally referring to them by name. Though the hand of the directors is evident in constructing the narrative, these candid moments give the impression that the viewers are experiencing life with the two Edies as it may have unfolded for any visitor to their derelict home. These narrative devices depict not only the unique personalities of the subjects, but also how those personalities translate into personal relationships. As such, they are very useful for any director seeking to document and contextualize the unique subjects of their documentary.

Preceding *Grey Gardens* by 14 years, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), by sociologist, Edgar Morin, and anthropologist/film maker, Jean Rouch, is a pioneering film in observational cinema that features many fascinating personalities. Observational filmmaking had only been made possible by the introduction of mobile cameras and portable tape recorders a short time before this film was created. Rouch was among the first film makers to employ this technology (Morin, 1960), thus *Chronicle of a Summer* exhibits many of the conventions that would later define observational and ethnographic documentaries early in their development.

Unlike the other films discussed here, the directors appear frequently on screen, with Morin playing a central role in many scenes. Both are present in the opening scene to explain the premise of the film. They are performing a sociological experiment to ascertain whether people can behave genuinely in front of a camera by filming Parisiennes as they go about their daily lives in the Summer of 1960. Rouch and Morin proceed to investigate this question through a

series of filmed, informal interviews interspersed with scenes from the lives of some of the interview subjects. The opening question of each interview, “Are you happy?”, generates a vast variety of responses, ranging from dismissive insults from passersby on the street to agitated diatribes by a frustrated factory worker to emotional introspection by a young, Italian émigré.

The film makes ample use of visual information to disclose aspects of interview subjects that add depth or context to their behavior in different scenes. A poignant example of this occurs during a somber interview featuring a college student and Marceline, a psychosociological researcher that features prominently in the film. The student describes his unhappy feelings of defeat and impotence while Marceline looks on sadly. She replies that she feels responsible for his unhappiness before revealing that the two have been romantically involved. The camera gradually pans down as Marceline speaks and comes to focus on a tattoo of numbers on her forearm. In this way, it is initially disclosed that Marceline is a holocaust survivor, an aspect of her that is further explored later in the film. Up until this point, Marceline has typically been shown in either a cheerful or professionally composed state, however choosing this scene to unveil her tragic history adds a profoundness to her first moment of sadness on camera. It also lays bare the age difference between the conflicted lovers that is otherwise left unspoken.

This method of disclosure is employed differently, but to equal effect, during an interview with a young Italian woman, Marilú, that had immigrated to France 3 years earlier. The interview focuses on what has been new for her during her initial years living in France, a topic which prompts a deeply emotional and introspective monologue regarding her disappointment in herself and her behavior since immigrating. Filming of Marilú during her response is focused on her face to an uncomfortable degree. She proceeds through a series of increasingly sad and

tortured expressions as she tells her story before the camera cuts to a close of her hands. They are shaking and constantly fiddling with a pair of rings. These visual elements relate back to Rouch and Morin's central aim in creating *Chronicle of a Summer*, to attempt to capture genuine human behavior on film. Marilú is clearly depressed. By focusing on the physical manifestations of her depression throughout the scene, the directors provide palpable evidence of her authenticity.

The term "cinema verité" sits at the heart of *Chronicle of a Summer*. It was coined by Morin the year before production started and reflects the central question of the film, whether it is possible to capture an objective truth in documentary film making (Morin, 1960). This is a question every documentary filmmaker must contend with in their career and one that continues to define the genre of observational cinema. While Rouch is famous for his use of the mobile camera in pursuit of anthropological truth, contemporary film theorists generally agree that some form of subjective narrative must exist for a film to make sense to the viewer (Bernard, 2012). Rouch exemplifies this in his documentaries of African cultures, films he believed showed Africans in a positive light, but which ultimately do not measure up to contemporary standards of racial discourse. Despite Rouch's best efforts, his films are clearly marked by the racial views of his time.

Documentarians since Rouch and Morin have accepted their inescapable influence on the narrative of the film. It could even be said that the Maysels directly use their influence on their subjects as a narrative device in *Grey Gardens*. As observational cinema has developed as a genre, however, directors have developed ways to make their presence ever more invisible to the audience. Interviews have become increasingly directed towards the camera, and thus the viewer, rather than the director and, furthermore, it is exceptionally rare for members of the film crew to

appear in scene for more than a moment at a time. The absence of cameras, crew, and other accoutrement of film making gives the illusion that nothing is altering the behavior of the documentary subjects and the audience is witnessing their lives unadulterated.

Sweetgrass (2010), by Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, represents observational filmmaking at possibly its most austere. The directors provide no text, interviews, or other device for exposition, relying instead on visuals alone for narrative. This film follows one of the last remaining shepherd families to conduct long distance sheep drives in Montana. Composed of long scenes that emphasize the “lived” time aspect of observational cinema, Barbash and Castaing-Taylor are clearly trying to document a quickly disappearing aspect of life in the rural mountainous west with minimal interference. At the same time, however, the film tells the story of the spartan family of Norwegian-American shepherds that have managed to keep this tradition alive.

Dialogue between subjects on screen is sparse and often reflects the task at hand, yet still provides insight into both their personalities and their relationships with other members of the shepherding family. A poignant example of this occurs during a scene in which the sheep are being corralled by a team of dogs and riders on horseback. Among the riders is a father and daughter, a relationship that is revealed entirely through a brief exchange between the two. For much of the scene, a teenage girl is busy riding after her dog and shouting commands to it as the dog struggles to focus on the task of guiding the cattle. When she rejoins the other riders for a brief period, an older male rider among them offers up a calm, but stern criticism of her dog's performance. It is implied that she has failed to properly train her dog in time for the cattle drive

The age of this rider, the tone of his voice, and his swift willingness to provide strict, constructive criticism of the girl's efforts imply a paternal relationship. In response, the girl offers up an excuse for her dog's behavior, but with deference to the older rider. These aspects of the exchange suggest that these are not two individuals brought together solely by work. There is a clear mentoring relationship that leads the viewer to the conclusion that they are related. Another relationship that is emphasized by this dialogue exchange is that between ranch hand and animal. In this case, it is made clear that the dogs accompanying the cattle drive are not members of the family, as domestic dogs are often considered, but rather members of a work force. They are not to be treated gently.

The relationship between person and animal in the context of a sheep drive emerges often in *Sweetgrass*, typically in a way that contrasts strongly with how animals are viewed in popular culture. This is a prominent theme in the opening scenes of the film, which occurs in a crowded and noise-filled sheep pen. As sheep are individually removed from their pens for shearing, they are roughly restrained by ranch hands and quickly shaved with electric clippers before a new sheep is immediately brought in. In a subsequent scene, a lamb is unceremoniously birthed amidst the chaos of the pen. Ranch hands quickly begin throwing other recently born lambs on top of it, rubbing them in the blood and bodily fluids that cover the new lamb's coat. The grotesque nature of this scene prompts the viewer to question what is happening before an answer emerges in the dialogue of the ranch hands. It is revealed that these are orphaned lambs being covered in the scent of the mother sheep with the hopes that she will adopt them. Again, it is emphasized that this is a financial operation and there is no time for tenderness.

The treatment of animals throughout the film serves as a unique reminder of how the culture of the west has changed with passing years. For many viewers, it is likely inconceivable to handle a dog or a newly born lamb in such a way. The stoic nature of the film and its gradual but determined pace almost seem to respond to this inner outrage by telling the viewer that there is no choice. The sheep drive must go on and these animals must serve their purpose if the family is to make a profit. These aspects of the film emphasize the distance between this culture and the one that has come to replace them in the modern west.

In contrast to these elements of a culture frozen in time, the directors often use the presence of technology in different scenes to remind the audience that this is a modern shepherding operation. The use of walkie-talkies between horse riders is regularly featured during the sheep drive and specialized shaving machines are employed to significant effect in the shearing scenes. For most viewers, the concept of shepherding as an occupation is likely to conjure images of pre-industrial revolution era technology. This use of modern technology as visual information responds to this mental image by both documenting an aspect of modern shepherding for the viewer while also underlining an aspect of the narrative. The viewer may assume that technology has made sheep driving easier for the family, but the film makes clear that it has only enabled them to keep up with the growing demands of modern America. Furthermore, the sheep drive of this family has become antiquated despite this technology, hinting at the inevitability of change.

Sweetgrass was an influence on both my style of filming and choice of subject matter. I believe it comes as close as a film can to blurring the line between narrative film making and anthropological data collection. Unlike the austere direction of Barbash and Castaing-Taylor,

however, I chose to employ narrative devices in the style of the Maysles a la *Grey Gardens*. The subject of my documentary certainly offered up a personality as unique as the two Edies and thus provided a natural anchor for a narrative-driven documentary. Though this narrative guided my filming process, I also sought to preserve moments of authenticity and truthful behavior as Rouch and Morin did in *Chronicle of a Summer*. In the following and final section, I will consider my film, *For the Love of Land*, in the context of the films discussed here. Each has provided a stylistic technique which I believe to have influenced my own observational approach.

CHAPTER THREE

FOR THE LOVE OF LAND

For the Love of Land opens with a short series of old black-and-white photos of a secluded ranch in Montana. Breaking with convention in observational cinema, I chose to employ a soundtrack, thus soft guitar music plays as the images pan across the screen. This brief set of establishing images serves as a prompt for the audience that brings their mind to the setting of the old, mountainous west and sets the gradual tempo of the film to come. In this way, they function as a plot device much as images of newspaper clippings did in *Grey Gardens* and *Chronicle of a Summer*. These images also introduce the audience to Hoiland ranch, the film's primary setting. The occasional use of black-and-white photos will continue throughout the film's opening moments as its elderly subject is gradually introduced, tying the weathered man seen in the documentary's footage back to the distant past preserved in these images.

John Hoiland is first seen tending to the small burial plot of his parents. There is a tremendous amount of visual information that offers clues to the audience about the film subject's relationship to the land and its history. Perhaps most obvious is that the burial plot is surrounded by wide open land. The man is clearly not visiting a cemetery, but a private plot on a vast stretch of land. It is indicated that a small family once lived on this land as only two graves occupy the plot. Furthermore, both graves are for people that were born over a century ago, with one having participated in World War I. This is not just a small family, but an old one. The man tending to the graves wears tattered, dirty clothing and his creased face is framed by a wild mane and beard of wispy, white hairs. Contrasting greatly with his age and appearance, the two graves

are well-kept and decorated with new flowers. It can easily be inferred that this man is the elderly, doting son of the two people buried here.

This scene concludes with a confirmational interview with John in which he states that these are his parents and that he would someday like to be buried alongside of them. Much like Rauch and Morin, I chose to use interviews to evoke genuine responses and behavior from my documentary subjects. This moment, though brief, is a powerful example of that. John does not look at the camera, but initially casts his gaze downward as he speaks in a slow, almost shaken fashion. It is hard to tell through his age, but care of this sight is still an emotional task for John. Exposition continues as John describes his parents' history with the ranch over photographs. The narrative of my documentary is primarily set up by these first few scenes. The relationships between this old man, these photographs, and these graves describe a melancholy truth, that he is the last one the last member of his family, the last person on this ranch, and among the last ranchers of his kind.

John's voice permeates the film, often providing slow-paced monologues that describe his way of life as visuals of his ranch are shown. This, in many ways, allows John to speak as the voice of his land, curating images of seasons passing and time progressing across the vast landscape and weathered buildings of his home. In one scene, for example, images of aging cars and farming equipment engulfed in deep snow are shown sitting quietly and motionless around the ranch. John's gentle voice enters the scene as he describes these items as "heirlooms" explaining that they cling to the land through the seasons, disappearing with the snow fall and reappearing with the spring thaw. The combination of slow, observed time in the scene and the gradual pace of John's sensitive monologue reflect not only the speed of life on the ranch, but

also the sensitivity of this life to the timing of the earth. This is further emphasized in other seasonal visuals, such as when John describes the perennial nature of ranch work over slow footage of a gentle stream.

These scenes describe both John's relationship with time and his land. Much like the heirlooms of the past that decorate his property, John is an artifact of a time long gone by that persists as seasons march on across the ranch. At one point, he begins to discuss the properties around him as massive modern homes sit atop hills in the distance. This is how the growing pressures of gentrification are introduced in the film. John describes his new neighbors as treating their land like an "ornament" a poetic choice that almost begs a direct comparison between the artifacts of old ranching activity that decorate his property and the vast expanses of unused land that once hosted ranches around him. Much like the use of technology in *Sweetgrass,* these scenes portend the fate awaiting John's ranch if he is unable to find a way to preserve it. This puts a human face to the impacts of shifting land usage throughout the mountainous west.

A candid interview with John at the conclusion of the scene described above reveals that the world of gentrification has already begun to reach into his life. John stands by a post with an orange swatch of paint on it as a title card briefly explains that the paint was placed there by his neighbors to indicate no hunting on the property, even though John has always welcomed hunters on to his property. He speaks directly to me during this interview, looking off camera to make eye contact. This emphasizes the face-to-face nature of our exchange. It is this exact type of exchange that John's neighbors have denied him in imposing their ideas of proper land use on

his property. A visual contrast is set up between this interview and the faceless neighbors John describes, which are represented only by images of their massive homes.

In a similar style to the Maysles in *Grey Gardens*, I use candid interviews and scenes of dialogue of this type to describe relationships between John and the handful of people that interact with him throughout the film. Such scenes not only reveal how other people act towards John, but also how he receives others. Comparing his varying reactions over these scenes provides insight into the unique way John fits into the modern world. Early in the film, Jimmy, a lifelong friend of John's, visits for conversation. Though it is impossible to say how much the camera influenced their actions, the two men comport themselves towards each other in much the same way. They both casually glance towards the ground as they discuss the weather and their plans for the day. As Jimmy sits for an interview, many of his ageing mannerisms recall John's, though at a slightly faster pace.

Compare this to later in the film, when John sits with an attorney to discuss the future of his property. By the attorney's wishes, I did not film him, however he can be heard off camera as he explains in a polished, professional dialogue the terms that John would need to agree to in order to begin the process of preserving his land. The camera is focused on John and his reactions for the entirety of the scene. When looking towards the attorney, he does not move his head or shift his body posture, but rather looks wearily from the corner of his eyes. His head is cocked to one side, emphasized by the large cowboy hat that adorns his wild, white hair. It can be inferred that there may be some suspicion of this man and his offerings on John's part. This is confirmed when John responds to the attorney's terms in his simple, layman's English, "And you'd have to live with it once you got this started?"

John is basically asking the attorney if he is giving his word to abide by the terms of the agreement he has just presented to him. The contrast in the mode of speaking between the two men highlights the degree to which John is out of place in these surroundings. This is further underlined by the plain, but dignified clothing that John has worn to the occasion. These are clearly his idea of nice clothes, but they appear very out of place against the backdrop of a legal meeting room in which suits and ties would seem appropriate. Comparing this exchange to that which occurs between John and Jimmy brings to the forefront aspects of both temporality and trustworthiness that are contained with John and his relationships. John and Jimmy speak the same language, don the same tired clothing, and emerged from the same place in time. There is a strong trust between the two, a trust that has rewarded John as Jimmy makes very clear through his interview answers that he cares for the wellbeing of his old friend.

The world of the legal firm, however, is one in which John is not a natural fit. He is in the awkward, almost helpless, position of having to put a tremendous amount of trust in these people that speak a different brand of English, wear different clothing, and are representative of a different western culture entirely. This contrast again highlights the creeping hand of gentrification in the mountainous west. People like John and Jimmy must inevitably negotiate with the powers-that-be to preserve their land. Beyond dialogue between subjects, this theme also emerges through tacit visual information contained in the *mise-en-scene.* The settings of John's daily life are rich with visual elements that provide depth and context to his way of life.

Taking inspiration from Morin and Rauch, I interspersed long, "lived time" sequences of John engaged with everyday tasks throughout the film. In one scene, John is washing dishes in his small, cluttered kitchen. Light is sparse in this area, with just enough to illuminate John

filtering in through a window over the sink. A flat of off-brand soda can be seen poking from a dusty shelf while simple dishes, like a cafeteria tray, can be seen populating the drying basket next to the sink. These items suggest the simplicity of John's daily life as well as the necessity of preparation on the ranch. Living on a fixed income, John must be thrifty, hence the off-brand soda, but living on a remote ranch, it is not always clear when he will be able to return to a grocery store. Thus, the necessity of purchasing a large amount of off-brand soda.

Long scenes of John at work are a consistent theme throughout the film. John's livelihood as a rancher is a definitive aspect of who he is. It clashes sharply with the frailty of his age. These visuals tie into the fact that John is the last of his family as there is no one left for him to hand the reigns of his operation to. As such, he can be seen tending to every aspect of ranching. In long, quiet scenes he slowly guides his tractor across the landscape. Other scenes showing him dispersing hay among hungry, eager cows that wait for him in the cold, his thin, old figure dwarfed among the massive bodies of the cattle. When the temperatures drop, John must ensure his cows have access to food and water. This also requires him to smash the ice over the West Boulder River with a pickaxe. The extreme physicality of this work calls for the strength and durability of a younger person, but only this elderly man is there to answer the call. Just like the rising homes around him and the black-and-white photos of his parents, John's aging body is yet another sign that time is passing and gradually carrying away this ancient rancher with it.

Chronology does not play a large role in my film as much as seasonality does. In the case of John's ranch, seasonality is defined by the presence of snow. When it arrives, snow coats the ranch and drastically alters life for John. Scenes are not ordered along a timeline but establishing shots of snow always inform the viewer of the type of scene that is coming. When the ground is

bare, John can be seen venturing into town donning his cowboy hat. He takes part in everyday activities of modern life, such as visiting the hardware store and even playing accordion at a town social. Snow, however, secludes John on his ranch. Scenes of winter carry a sense of austerity, struggle, and unexpected complications. In one scene, John's pipes unexpectedly freeze and we must descend into his cluttered basement with him as he attempts to find the source of the problem. In another, a calf is birthed in the midst of the winter and John must work with his neighbor to repair a pen to protect the calf and its mother from predators that roam the winter landscape.

The changing of the seasons is one of the few constants that have remained in John's life, something he indicates that he feels fortunate to continue to see as he approaches 94 when speaking at the film's conclusion. It brings the viewer back to the constant presence of time as it marches past John and the remainder of the mountainous west. For most modern people, the coming of winter brings a transition to a more sedentary, indoor lifestyle, but for John it still marks another phase in the cycle of work on the ranch that he must complete to survive. It is clearly miraculous that John is still able to complete his work at his age, yet the continuous presence of time in the film begs the question of how much longer it will let John continue the ranch as he has.

In the end, the elements of the film document one of Montana's last independent ranchers while also telling a story of finality, disappearance, and what it means to be the last of something. John and his land remain frozen in time, scarcely changed from the black-and-white photographs that permeate the opening of the film. The world around John's land, however, has changed immensely, something that can easily be exemplified by the simple visual mismatch of

this dignified rancher walking the streets of a modern Montana town. As the Maysles did with the Beales of Grey Gardens, I sought to preserve the unique personality of this man and how it interacted with the world. Inspired by Morin and Rouch, I also sought to capture some of the sad truth that underlies the glamorous reimagining of the American west. In the end, as *Sweetgrass* did before me, I hope I have provided a cinematic vehicle to spark conversation and draw attention to the difficult issue of rural gentrification in the west.

CONCLUSION

The aim of my documentary, *For Love of the Land*, was to tell the story of 94-year-old rancher, John Hoiland, and document his struggle with gentrification in the rural west. I was inspired to approach this subject from the lens of observational cinema by the genre's delicate balancing of narrative and documentation. Following the central teachings of this style of film making, I immersed myself in John's world and captured him going about his daily life with minimal direction or speaking on my part (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009). In doing so, I sought to preserve this man at his most authentic (Morin, 1960). Around John I built a narrative detailing the loneliness and struggle of life when you are the last of something in a changing world. This narrative was pieced together primarily through visual elements, the presence of the seasons during filming, and candid interviews with my subject. Ultimately, I believe *For Love of the Land* successfully communicates both the pressures of gentrification on residents of the rural west and the tragic position that these last remaining personalities of the old west find themselves in as the world around them changes.

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