Authenticity on the Ground: Engaging the Past in a California Ghost Town

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This qualitative study explores how the concept of authenticity is constructed, experienced and employed by visitors and staff in the provocative landscape of the ghost town of Bodie, California. Bodie State Historic Park, once a booming gold-mining town, now greets some two hundred thousand tourists annually and is widely applauded for its authenticity. In this paper, I explore the meaning of this term in its ghost-town context: while boom-town Bodie was a bustling commercial center, ghost-town Bodie appears abandoned and devoid of commercial activity. Thus, authenticity in a ghost town is not tied to the accuracy with which it represents its past. Yet a version of Bodie's past is what both visitors and staff experience: they employ Bodie's authenticity to engage with the mythic West, a romanticized version of the Anglo-American past that upholds dominant contemporary Anglo-American values. Bodie's false-fronted facades and ramshackle miners' cabins call forth these images, familiar to visitors from movie Westerns. Since ghost towns have few or no residents, it is largely through the landscape and the artifacts that are part of that landscape that these mythic images are experienced. Thus, an experience of authenticity is not the end result of a visit to Bodie; rather, authenticity is a vehicle through which both visitors and staff engage with powerful notions about American virtues. In this paper, I explore how the notion of authenticity is triggered by landscape, and examine the narratives about the past that the concept of authenticity enables. *Key Words: authenticity, landscape, mythic West, ghost town.*

In the mid-1950s, representatives of the State of California Division of Beaches and Parks (later the California Department of Parks and Recreation) began a project, completed in 1964, to acquire a ghost town called Bodie as a State Historic Park (Figure 1). The Division's Master Plan for the Park described the townsite as it appeared at that time:

> Bodie is a few score of weather beaten wooden structures in a treeless wind swept valley. The lonely remains of what once was a brawling, lusty, mining town and a colorful page in our State's history. Here, in the high desert country east of the crest of the central Sierras, can be seen the townsite and the former homes of the miners, the downtown area, and the old mining shafts and mills where they labored mightily. Here too, in this remote and deserted town, one can feel, as perhaps nowhere else in this State, the true experience of being in a ghost town as the wind billows the curtains in a home where no one lives or rattles the bar room doors that will open no longer . . . (State of California, Division of Beaches and Parks, n.d. (ca. 1958):2).[1]

Early correspondence between officials of the Division of Beaches and Parks laid out a plan for the preservation and presentation of the landscape and the artifacts of the new park, a policy that would later be known as "arrested decay:"

> [S]tabilization of the existing scene should be followed instead of a development or restoration program . . .. [T]he general appearance [of the town should be] retain[ed] . . .. [Buildings should be] stabilize[d] structurally [in order to] retain all exterior appearance and charm of the *authentic ghost town*, . . . [the] curved walls, sagging roofs, broken windows, etc. (Superintendent Clyde Newlin to Chief Newton B. Drury, Sept. 9, 1955, Bodie State Historic Park Unit History files, emphasis added).

And the Master Plan for Bodie State Historic Park explained the experience visitors to the ghost town were expected to have:

> The visitor to this park will see an example of an early day mining town in a remote area and apart from the usual oppressive elements of our civilized world . . .. [T]he visitor will be able to see not only how these people lived but how they worked the mines and processed the ore to capture the precious gold . . .. In this setting he will be able to better understand the courage and resourcefulness of our ancestors in building this nation (State of

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Figure 1. Bodie State Historic Park, just east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California.

California, Division of Beaches and Parks, n.d. (ca. 1958):5).

Thus, Division personnel believed that by presenting Bodie as an "authentic ghost town" devoid of civilization's "oppressive elements," visitors to the Park would be able to see, to feel, and therefore to understand the lives of our "courageous" and "resourceful" pioneering American forebears. In other words, to Division personnel, the "authentic ghost town" of Bodie represented mythic notions about the American West that could be experienced through landscape (Figure 2).[2]

By the late 1990s, some two hundred thousand visitors yearly traveled the rough dirt road to Bodie State Historic Park. The false-fronted facades and ramshackle miners' cabins of this gold-mining ghost town call forth images familiar to visitors from movie Westerns: heroic images of American pioneers. And since ghost towns like Bodie have few or no surviving residents, it is largely through the landscape of ghost towns, and the artifacts that are part of that landscape, that this American essence is apprehended. In Bodie's landscape, the dilapidated buildings and lack of commercialism entice visitors to recognize Bodie as an "authentic" ghost town, but what does this mean? In this paper, through examples from a qualitative study of contemporary Bodie, I first explore how the notion of authenticity is triggered by landscape, and then examine the narratives about the past that the concept of authenticity enables.

Figure 2. For the two hundred thousand visitors to California's Bodie State Historic Park, the provocative landscape evokes images of the mythic West, familiar from film and fiction. Many of Bodie's commercial buildings show the false-fronted facades popular in such fly-by-night towns because they made buildings appear more substantial. The unpainted wooden building in the center of the photograph is Bodie's Miners' Union Hall, once home to the local IWW chapter, now a museum.

On Methods, Backgrounds, and Perspective

In recent years, a good deal of academic attention has been drawn to the complex and shifting concept of authenticity as experienced by tourists and presented by their hosts. Some have been critical of tourists, seeing them as easily lured in by glossy confections of hyperreality and naively attributing authenticity to that which is patently inauthentic (Cohen 1988; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Eco 1986; Hewison 1987; Lewis 1975; MacCannell 1976; see also Benjamin 1969; Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). More recently, other academics have attempted to validate tourists' impressions and experiences of authenticity, understanding the concept as a social construction the meaning of which varies with different people, at different times, and in different places (Bruner 1994; May 1996). It is here that I locate this work, drawing particularly on the works of anthropologists studying living-history museums (see, for example, Bruner 1994; Gable and Handler 1993; Gable and Handler 1996; Gable et al. 1992; Handler and Gable 1997). With these anthropologists, I share a qualitative mode of investigation, but as a geographer, I focus in particular on how the notion of authenticity is informed and influenced by landscape elements.[3] Within the field of geography, studies of landscape are often text-based or archival works (see Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Duncan and Duncan 1988; Duncan 1990; Duncan and Ley 1993; Henderson 1994; Mitchell 1996). In that context, this paper serves as a contribution to a growing literature that uses participant observation and other qualitative methods as a tool for examining landscape and meaning (see also Dowler 1997; Duncan and Duncan 1997; Johnson 1996; Routledge 1997).

Qualitative work with tourists, however, has its own difficulties, since the hurried schedules of many contemporary travelers often make them little interested in talking to academics as they

visit a particular site. Jon May resolved this problem in his research by conducting in-depth interviews of tourists at their homes (1996). Eric Gable and Richard Handler resolved it by concentrating mainly on the production of the site they studied, rather than its reception and interpretation by visitors (Gable and Handler 1993; Handler and Gable 1997).[4] I resolved it by engaging in a multiyear study that enabled me to observe and interview large numbers of visitors to Bodie. But my work differs from others also because of the nature of my involvement with the project: not only did I study Bodie's visitors and staff, I also lived and worked there as a member of the seasonal maintenance staff for ten summers as a participant-observer with a heavy emphasis on participation. Thus, many of the insights my work reveals are the result of being an intimate part of the community I studied.

When one studies a community of which one is part, there are, of course, a number of methodological and epistemological challenges that result—challenges engaged by academics from various fields (Clatts 1994; Crimp 1992; England 1994; Gilbert 1994; Krieger 1991; Messerschmidt 1981; Narayan 1993; Porteous 1988; Routledge 1996; and Thorne 1983). While, at one time, so-called native anthropologists who studied their own communities were looked down upon (Narayan 1993), in the postcolonial world of flux and flow, the very concepts of native and nonnative, insider and outsider, field and work have been reexamined (Appadurai 1990; Messerschmidt 1981; Narayan 1993). Much feminist and so-called postmodern ethnographic and qualitative work has paid particular attention to placing oneself in the research, to recognizing one's own subject position, to critical examination of one's own body as research instrument, to participating actively in the researched community, and to studying a community of which one is part (Chouinard and Grant 1996; Clatts 1994; Gilbert 1994; Messerschmidt 1981; Parr 1998; Routledge 1996; Thorne 1983). In my case, while I lived the challenges of such a study and while I attempted to "explicitly recognize and theorize the site of [my] representation" (Duncan and Ley 1993:8), my position as a member of Bodie's staff also gave me both access and insight. Like most other staff members, I had started as an outsider, a visitor. In order to engage in a long-term qualitative study of a community with a permanent population of fewer than twenty, though, I had to become an insider, and as an insider I was able to gain insight from everyday lived experiences in that community. In Bodie, the members of the Park's staff are an important part of visitor experiences of the ghost town: we influence visitor interpretations of the Park by what we say, by what we do, and by our very presence as resident employees (physically in our bodies as we work in the Park, but also in our traces, like the "employees' residence" signs on our houses that alert visitors to our presence even when we are unseen). This paper, then, draws on these knowledges and challenges through my interactions with thousands of visitors over the years, and my life experiences as a staff member at Bodie State Historic Park.

Some may question my attempt to represent the views of so many from so privileged a position. While my interpretations are of the views and experiences of a majority of Bodie's visitors and staff, I acknowledge that other views exist. But Bodie is not the best choice of location for a geographer interested in studying difference, for both its visitors and staff make up a remarkably homogeneous population: nearly all are white, middle class, and overwhelmingly of suburban origins (when some five hundred cars entered the park daily, African Americans and Hispanics, for example, arrived in perhaps six of those cars, and all of Bodie's staff were white). Whiteness itself, which has long served as "a sort of invisible norm, the unraced center of a racialized world" (Newitz and Wray 1997:3), more recently has become a subject of study for academics, geographers among them, who recognize Whiteness as "an historically specific social formation, shaped within a racialized problematic" (Jackson 1999:294; see also Bonnet 1997; Frankenberg 1993; Hartigan 1997; Hill 1997; Jackson 1998; Wray and Newitz 1997). To study how landscape is interpreted in contemporary Bodie, then, is to study aspects of hegemonic Whiteness, for in an increasingly multicultural world, Bodie's contemporary reality remains white and middle class, and that reality, as we shall see, is projected onto the town's past with powerful implications for what can be learned from it.

I will turn first to an exploration of the mythic West and its role in contemporary American culture. As the dominant version of the past presented and experienced in the Park, the mythic West is important in both Bodie's

present and past. I will show that Bodie's own history played a role in structuring the mythic West as the town and the myth both emerged in the nineteenth century. I will then briefly outline some types of Western ghost towns, exploring how authenticity plays itself out in such landscapes. The bulk of the paper comprises empirical material from my ten-year study of Bodie State Historic Park, a qualitative study in which I used, in addition to participant observation, flexibly structured interviewing, landscape interpretation, and document analysis to explore the narratives the Park presents, and how those narratives are engaged by visitors and staff. Here I will show how, in Bodie's provocative landscape, visitors and staff use authenticity as a vehicle to engage popularly held notions about the mythic West and American virtues, fantasies about the past that hold meaning for those who indulge them.[5]

West of the Imagination: Ghost Towns and the Mythic West

For more than a decade now, geographers have written about landscape as one of the most powerful cultural signifying systems (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Duncan and Duncan 1988; Duncan and Ley 1993; Mitchell 1996; for a "selective genealogy" (p. 660) of landscape work, see Schein 1997). Early on Peirce Lewis pointed out that "landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our . . . values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (1979:12). In the ghost town of Bodie, as we shall see, visitors actually come seeking autobiographical elements in the landscape: they look to the landscape for clues to a past that reflects their own values in the present. So while some landscape traces may be left behind unwittingly, as Lewis asserted, they may be sought very deliberately.

More recently, new cultural geographers have questioned these landscape traces and the meanings we make from them (again, see Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Duncan and Duncan 1988; Duncan and Ley 1993; Mitchell 1996; Schein 1997). James Duncan has pointed out that this very unwitting aspect of landscape grants it such ideological power: "By becoming part of the everyday, the taken-for-granted . . . the landscape masks the ideological nature of its form and content" (1990:19). Thus, though landscape is often an unquestioned part of the social environment of our everyday lives, it conveys powerful cultural and ideological messages. Indeed, according to anthropologist Åsa Boholm, embedded in landscape are the "collective representations which organize and structure people's perceptions of time and space"(1997:250). Historic sites and places of memory such as ghost towns are, at least ostensibly, landscapes of the past, but such landscapes, and the artifacts that are part of them, are seldom truly left to the ravages of time. Rather, they are more often expressly set up to be interpreted by visitors in the present. But as these artifacts and landscapes are reinterpreted by each generation of viewers, they can convey new meanings and new associations far from what their original users had in mind: "artifacts become tangible evidence on which [new] interpretations of the past can be constructed" (Radley 1990:59; see also Boholm 1997:251; Lowenthal 1985).

In ghost towns or living-history museums, such landscapes convey not the past per se, but how people in the present think about the past (see Boholm 1997; Bruner 1994; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Gable and Handler 1993; Gable et al. 1992; Handler and Gable 1997; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Johnson 1996; Lowenthal 1966, 1975, 1989). For example, though more than a hundred structures survive in Bodie State Historic Park today, this number is thought to represent just five percent of the structures present during the town's boom period in the late 1870s and early 1880s (see Figure 3). But the fires, harsh weather, and neglect did not strike every part of Bodie evenly, and here certainly David Lowenthal's statement pertains that "[t]angible survivals . . . tend to feature the more impressive works of man . . . and thus exaggerate the prominence of past environments" (1975:29). Indeed, much of what survives of Bodie could be described as a middle-class suburb: of the tent-cabins that once housed many miners, none remain; of the small shacks thrown up hurriedly in the early days of the town's boom, few have survived. No plot of preservation, however, masterminded Bodie's remnants. Rather, as the population declined, those who stayed behind often made quite simple decisions to move into the more commodious abandoned homes.[6] The remaining lesser homes either fell to ravages of time, weather, and fire, or, in some cases, were actually

Figure 3. View of boomtown Bodie ca. 1879. Main Street runs from left to right across the photograph, and was at that time lined with as many as sixty-five saloons, dance- and gambling-halls. Visible also are the tent-cabins hurriedly thrown up to accommodate a rapidly growing population, and a large number of hotels and rooming houses. Virtually none of these buildings remain today, as only five percent of Bodie is thought to survive. (Courtesy California State Library.)

burned up bit by bit in the wood stoves of the nicer homes.[7] But what image of the town's past does the small remnant present? With few hotels and rooming houses but many single-family homes, a number with quaint picket fences, Bodie today presents an image approaching middle-class domesticity. With only one of the town's half-dozen or so ore-processing stamp mills remaining and nearly all the mining area off limits to tourists, the surviving downtown businesses (bank, store, post office, restaurant, barber shop, laundry, hotels, saloons) create the impression of a much more service industry-oriented town than the gold-mining town of Bodie ever was. And this, in turn, corresponds closely to the late-twentieth century realities of the Park's majority white middle-class suburban-dwelling visitors. Thus, the remains of Bodie the town as reflected in Bodie the State Historic Park present, not a community dramatically different from that of the Park's contemporary visitors, but rather one surprisingly like it: rather than challenging visitors' notions about life in the past, a visit to Bodie reaffirms the realities of their present[8] (Figure 4).

Anthropologists studying living-history museums have noted that the primary mode of apprehending such places for visitors is the visual (Bruner 1994). In the ghost town of Bodie, this is certainly the case. The power of the visual for the viewer of Bodie's landscape is its ability to translate an external phenomenon (sight, a visual impression) and link it to internal experience or cultural beliefs (in this case the mythic West and contemporary American values) (see Duncan 1990). Indeed, to Bodie's predominantly American visitors, the town's visual appearance is both dramatic and familiar.[9] As Thomas and Geraldine Vale have noted (1989), Americans have made their Western past heroic, and the towns of that past, many of which are now ghost towns, are a celebrated part of it.

Though many geographers and historians, such as Frederick Jackson Turner (1894), Walter Prescott Webb (1931), Donald Meinig (1972), and Richard White (1991), have done significant work that views the West as a region, another tradition views the West through the imagination, exploring its importance as myth,

Figure 4. Much of what survives of Bodie represents a middle-class suburb. The buildings seen here include the homes of a banker, a butcher, an attorney, a bar owner, and a stable operator, with the Methodist church, built after Bodie's boom had ended, at the upper right.

for, as White (1991:613) has written, "[f]or more than a century the American West has been the most strongly *imagined* section of the United States," where independence, self-reliance, and high moral character reign.[10] Of course, one cannot truly create so simple a dichotomy between the "real" or historic West and the mythic West. That would imply that the two can be readily separated, whereas, in fact, they have been in many ways mutually constitutive: "the actual West and the imagined [or mythic] West are engaged in a constant conversation; each influences the other" (White 1991:615).

Over the last 150 years or more, as writers, filmmakers, artists, musicians, and television producers took up Western topics, their themes evolved into a genre, the Western, which became "a defining element of American popular culture" until these heroic images and ideas became a nearly ubiquitous presence, "intruding constantly on everyday American life" (White 1991:613). But neither did the residents of the West remain outside this influence. Rather, as the mythic West gathered force, Westerners themselves began to model their lives on the mythic images. For example, White (1991) describes how, in 1849, when Western lawman Kit Carson arrived at a Jicarilla Apache camp too late to rescue a white woman from Apache assault, he was amazed to find on the scene, along with the woman's dead body, a copy of an unidentified book portraying him as a great hero. In the aftermath of his failure to rescue the woman, Carson lamented his inability to live up to his fictional reputation. Thus, the mythic Carson became a standard for the real Carson, a point made still more dramatically by the fact that Carson told the tale in a book (Quaife 1966) about his exploits, which in turn was designed to capitalize on his mythologized reputation. In this way, while characters in the West, like Carson, are a part of history, they, their history, and how we remember them are also a part of myth (White 1991).

Western towns and ghost towns are no different. By the time the gold-mining town of Bodie entered its boom period (between 1879 and 1881), the mythic West had already established its place in American social memory (Athearn 1986; Nash 1991; White 1991). But journalists in Western mining camps, such as Samuel Clemens (who visited Bodie) and Bret Harte, helped to localize the mythic West, fixing its location, in part, in towns like Bodie, as their tales traveled eastward to reach audiences far beyond the camps (Lewis 1967; McGrath 1984). Though journalists of the period are widely known to have colored their reports with hyperbole, even purportedly pure reporting contributed to the construction of the mythic West. Bodie, during its boom period, rapidly acquired a reputation as a rough town, full of bad men. Of course, Bodie *was* a "shooters' town": between 1878 and 1882, there were no fewer than seventy shooting incidents in which some thirty-five men were killed and some two dozen more were wounded. But with a population as high as 10,000, the *rate* of most crimes was dramatically lower there than in Eastern cities of the period. Muggings and burglaries were comparatively rare, but shootings, between consenting male participants, were not. As historian Roger McGrath has noted, these fights were often acts of "reckless bravado" where insults, careless remarks, or challenges to fighting prowess could easily lead to gunfire. Thus it was not the quantity but rather the spectacular nature of Bodie's crimes and their high-spirited participants, that caused the town's reputation to spread far and wide in the late nineteenth century, until one Bodie newspaper, in joking comment on the town's reputation, proclaimed, "there is a man for breakfast not unfrequently" (*Bodie Daily Free Press*, June 10, 1881, quoted in McGrath 1984: 223). The pistol-packing, knife-carrying men of Bodie soon became known as "bad men," until the phrase "Badmen of Bodie" became legendary in itself. In fact, the Badmen of Bodie and the town's reputation became so widely known that soon rough characters in other towns were assumed to have been former Bodieites (Lewis 1967; McGrath 1984). One man, arrested in Stockton, California, claimed he was "mortified" at the local papers' "bad man from Bodie headlines" that proclaimed his reputation for carrying a "brace of pistols in my belt a la Bodie bad men," for, he explained to the judge, "I have never been in Bodie" (*San Francisco Call*, May 6, 1881, quoted in McGrath 1984:223). During Bodie's boom period, mythologized stories about badmen helped define the very character of the town and its inhabitants. In places like Bodie, myth and history interact with each other. As White (1991:616) has written, "the mythic West imagined by Americans has shaped the West of history just as the West of history has helped create the West Americans have imagined" (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Visitors to Bodie access the mythic West intertextually through the town's provocative landscape elements, artifacts that they encounter both outside Bodie's buildings and inside by looking in through the windows (only three buildings are open to the public). Here, a player piano, spittoon and bottles on a bar call forth images of a Wild-West saloon, familiar from movie Westerns.

Thus, the mythic West is a shifting construct: sometimes located in space, at other times only in the mind; and each generation has made its own contributions to the myth. But while Bodie's nineteenth-century contribution to the myth was based largely on the bad reputation of high-spirited men, the mythic West has also represented "different versions of the American Dream" (Nash 1991:197).[11] From the days of novelist James Fenimore Cooper, the mythic West became an antidote to the present, where "heroes enforced the highest standards of manliness and morality" (Nash 1991:206, see also Athearn 1986).

By the time the town of Bodie had firmly entered the period of its decline in the 1890s, the mythic West already contained many of the same elements that dominate it today: Americans then, as now, sought an escape from their rapidly changing society, at the same time as they sought to confirm the benefits of that society. As historian Gerald Nash has written, this mythic West was:

> peopled by noble and distinctive individuals . . . a stark contrast to the millions of faceless immigrants from eastern and southern Europe who were just then pouring into the nation's urban centers. And the dominant Anglo settlers of this mythical region displayed great nobility of character and the finest values of the nineteenth-century Protestant Ethic, individualism, self-reliance, courage, and a love for freedom (Nash 1991: 208).

In response to increasing urbanism and industrialization, Americans looked upon the mythic West as a majestic and uncluttered landscape, sparsely populated by Anglo settlers, and for many, it became an antidote to the crass commercialism of twentieth-century life. As industrialization and urbanization accelerated, the desire to escape became still stronger (Athearn 1986; Nash 1991; White 1991). But this escape has never been total, for visitors, like those arriving in Bodie in air-conditioned cars, have always brought the material benefits and conveniences of contemporary life with them. Because the mythic West is interpreted in the

context of contemporary conveniences, the past that it represents, though idealized, stands out as "harder" and more austere than current existence. Thus the myth powerfully sustains modernist notions of societal progress. It offers an escape from urban-industrial life while preserving the benefits of that life; it provides a glimpse of the good old days while simultaneously affirming the notion of progress. As White has written (1991:621), "In the end, the imaginative journey to the primitive [mythic] West rehabilitated modern values and reoriented Americans toward a version of progress . . .".

It is in accordance with these mythic themes that the Western past has been commemorated, in fiction, film, advertising, art, television, and landscape. The West has been popularized in American fiction at least since Cooper wrote his novels, when the western frontier was in fact located in what we now consider the East. Since 1903, when *The Great Train Robbery* heralded the emergence of the Western film, the mythic West has been able to reach a far larger audience, becoming through film and later television "part of the cultural language by which America understands itself" (Wright 1975:12; see also Nash 1991, White 1991).[12]

These film and television Westerns began by applying formulae already established in literary Westerns, but the images they conveyed were perhaps even more powerful since the audience now not only imagined but saw the dramatic Western landscape such productions presented (White 1991). That landscape holds a central significance to the Westerns of film and television, as it establishes the vital relation of the setting to the stories and actions of the mythic West (Lenihan 1980; Wright 1975). As film historian John Lenihan explains (1980:12):

> First, there [is] the land—plains, desert, mountains—that both threaten[s] the pioneer society and promise[s] future greatness; and then there [are] the beginnings of civilization—ranches, forts and small towns with saloon, sheriff's office, store, bank and sometimes a school or church—that promise human fulfillment if immediate dangers [can] be met.

With astonishing precision, contemporary Bodie State Historic Park evokes exactly these images. The steep east side of the Sierra Nevada mountains rises nearly 10,000 feet above the high-desert floor of the Owens Valley just south of Bodie. One road, U.S. Highway 395, traverses this region of sagebrush-covered valleys and rolling hills surrounded by steep peaks that remain snow-capped all summer long. To reach Bodie State Historic Park, visitors drive thirteen miles up a narrow, winding road that turns to dirt several miles before reaching the ghost town at an elevation of nearly 8,400 feet. Cresting the rim of the Bodie bowl, visitors experience a personal thrill of discovery as they first see the mine tailings on Bodie Bluff, which rises steeply behind the townsite. Moments later, the weather-beaten false-fronted buildings of Main Street and the scattered homes and miners' shacks leap into view. Visible and recognizable almost immediately as well are the Methodist church with its steeple and the school with its bell tower.

Although the nearly ubiquitous images of movie and television Westerns generally depict the Wild West of the cowboy variety, most Western film sets closely resemble ghost towns, which were spawned mainly by the mining frontier as the extractive industry fell silent. Visitors can easily merge the movie and television images of the Wild West with what they see in Bodie State Historic Park. Thus, the visit easily becomes an intertextual experience in the mythic West, which here finds a place in space, a landscape expression. Visitors to Bodie talk about "experiencing" the "Old West." It is not uncommon, for example, on a summer afternoon, to hear the whistled theme song from Sergio Leone's 1967 film, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. In fact, the staff are quite frank about the filmic inspirations for visitor interpretations of the landscape. As one staff member put it: "Let's face it, Americans grew up with Western movies, I mean, [they were] a big deal during the 1960s and '70s. And there's a part of them that wants to be able to relive those days." Neither, however, are the staff immune from such constructions of the town's past: For a brief period in the 1970s, rather than the standard ranger-type uniforms worn by nearly all California State Park employees, staff at Bodie wore "western garb," and supervisors, like the movie good guys, wore white, not black, Stetsons. These images of the West are so pervasive and so powerful that many visitors and staff experience not Bodie's actual past, but filmic notions of the mythic West inspired by and projected onto Bodie's landscape.

For successive generations of Americans, as Nash has written (1991), the mythic West has served as a mirror to contemporary society that could explain Americans to themselves. The stories of towns, outlaws, and heroes changed, just as the society changed, until, when "Americans looked into the imagined West for images of themselves, their own present situation determined what was reflected back" (White 1991: 625). Just as the imaginary Orient served to define not the Orient but the Occident for itself (Said 1978), the mythic West became America's "other," a "mythical land which was astride the real America, if only in the imagination of its citizens," and through which Anglo Americans defined themselves (Nash 1991:225). The mythic West, then, acts as a mirror that reflects what we want to see about ourselves, a mirror that is adaptable to individual and group needs over time, and even at one time. The mythic West is a place, sometimes fixed in space, sometimes not, where Anglo Americans can embrace constructions of the Western myth and American values of courage, individualism, and hard-won achievement (Athearn 1986). And just like this mythic West, ghost towns can mirror, for Anglo Americans, the past as they want to believe it, their own story as they want it to have been.

The mythic West, then, is essentially a feedback loop: created in local and national media but reflected back in the lives of real towns and real people until the images and ideas became an expected and formative part of the towns and the people themselves. For some ghost towns, Bodie included, their mythic history is as important as what some might call their actual history, as fictional(ized) stories have become critical ways of understanding the towns themselves.

An Authentic Ghost Town?

By the mid-1880s, when Bodie's gold strikes had largely played out, the town's population plummeted rapidly, leaving many buildings abandoned. Intermittent large-scale mining activity ceased there only after the Second World War, but by the late 1920s, with the rise of automobile tourism, the now isolated town had already become a tourist attraction. Beginning in 1962, the remains of the town (some 120 buildings and their contents) were acquired by the State of California. In 1964, Bodie was dedicated as a California State Historic Park.

Bodie has joined the hundreds of western settlements known popularly as "ghost towns." Though not all ghost towns are former mining camps, the term seems to have arisen in reference to such towns (Barnhart 1988; Moore 1926), and is so frequently applied to them that Windham even included a "ghost town stage" as part of the life cycle of a western mining district (1981:251, 256). But not all ghost towns look like Bodie. In fact, a great variety exists (DeLyser 1998), including towns where virtually nothing remains, neither residents nor their traces (Aurora, Nevada); towns where commercial life is still ongoing (Tombstone, Arizona); and attractions built entirely, or almost entirely, from scratch for the purpose of drawing tourists' dollars (Knott's Berry Farm, California). They may be big, with many structures and artifacts (as Bodie is), or small (like Skidoo, California). Ghost towns can be publicly owned (as Bodie is); privately owned by one owner (Cerro Gordo, California) or by numerous owners (Virginia City, Nevada); or seemingly unowned (Masonic, California). Buildings may be abandoned and largely or completely collapsed (as in Masonic), restored (as in Columbia, California), preserved but not restored (as in Bodie), or reproduced (as in Calico, California). Ghost towns may generate income (as in Bodie), or profit (as in Oatman, Arizona), or neither (as in Rhyolite, Nevada). And finally, those who live in or make their living from a ghost town may be very aware of their town's ghost-town status (as in Bodie, or the artists' community of Jerome, Arizona), or they may attempt to deny it (as in Tombstone, Arizona).[13]

With such a wide array of ghost towns, how can authenticity be understood in such places? In order to understand, we must view authenticity as a socially constructed concept. In other words, authenticity is not simply a condition inherent in an object, awaiting discovery, but a term that has different meanings in different contexts, in different places, to different people, and even to the same person at different times (Bruner 1994; Till 1999).

There are many different kinds of authenticity. In his field work at New Salem, the reconstructed village where Abraham Lincoln once lived, anthropologist Edward Bruner (1994) identified five types. The first is authentic in the sense of being an original and not a copy, like

Bodie, because it once was a real mining town, but not New Salem, which was reconstructed from scratch. The second meaning, authoritative or legally valid, includes both Bodie and New Salem in the sense that both are authorized by their respective states. The third type of authenticity in the sense that the place is a currently credible version of the past, again fits both Bodie and New Salem, for both appear credible to today's visitors as authentic versions of what they represent.

The fourth is authentic in the sense that a person from the period ostensibly represented (the 1880s in Bodie or the 1830s in New Salem) would recognize the place as authentic. Even more than the others, this type is slippery: would miners from Bodie recognize the Park as the town they knew? Probably not, but neither does the Park, as a ghost town, claim to *be* the town it once was. As for reconstructed places like New Salem, a visitor with a sharp eye for period detail can usually pick out inauthentic traces, particularly modern conveniences like restrooms, electricity, and alarm systems; presumably visitors from the past would do so, too. Bruner also mentions a fifth form of authenticity: that of intention, of not being deliberately misleading. And finally, he suggests that there are many more expressions of authenticity available in different settings, and at different times.

Sociologist Diane Barthel (1996) views authenticity through a slightly different lens, judging the authenticity of a historic place based on three criteria: site, structures, and content. Under this framework, authentic sites are the original sites for particular buildings or towns, and thus Bodie would be authentic because it has never been moved, but so would the ghost town at Calico, California where numerous structures have been reproduced or otherwise added. In the case of authentic structures, these too must be "original" to be authentic. And here also, Bodie's structures are deemed authentic because none of them has ever been reproduced. But in this sense,Virginia City, Nevada is also authentic even though its buildings have undergone extensive restoration and adaptive reuse. Authenticity of content, Barthel writes (1996), is difficult to judge because it often involves a subtlety of representation whereby objects and artifacts from the period represented are seen as authentic. In this sense, Bodie, again, is authentic, for the objects visible on the insides of Bodie's buildings are original to the town, artifacts of daily life there in the past. Inauthentic in this case are the modern intrusions mentioned above that pervade tourist-oriented sites, such as restrooms and alarm systems. In order to portray this type of authenticity, such intrusions are minimized or hidden from view (as is the case in Bodie, where most buildings have hidden alarm systems).

Thus, the situation is quite variable and complex, and, as Barthel points out (1996:10):

> Given these considerations, determining absolute authenticity becomes a more metaphysical than practical exercise. What is more productive is to understand what the different social actors—preservationists, politicians, developers, publics—think is authentic and why authenticity matters to them, if indeed, it does matter.

According to Barthel, though, the public "implicitly accepts what it sees" (1996:7) and does not question a site's authenticity. On the contrary, my research shows that both Bodie's staff and visitors actively question and assess the Park's authenticity. And their acceptance of it is key to their ability to interpret narratives about the mythic West. But neither is authenticity naively presented by the Park's staff, who actively construct and even contest or resist different versions of authenticity.

Historic sites like Williamsburg use meticulous restoration or careful reproduction to muster authenticity. In ghost towns, however, authenticity is constructed through decay and tarnish. Visitors and staff laud frailty as authentic and decry commercialization as inauthentic. In Bodie, while some visitors are attracted by the Park's reputation as an authentic ghost town (even as the most authentic ghost town in the U.S.[14]) most come, not primarily on a quest for authenticity, but to explore the townsite. And while many question and assess Bodie's authenticity as part of their visit, as we shall see, most engage with the Park's perceived authenticity as a medium through which to experience the narratives about the American past that the Park presents. Thus, visitors employ authenticity as a means to an end: neither the primary purpose of most visits, nor their only outcome.

In the following four sections of the paper, I will trace the presentation and interpretation of authenticity in Bodie's landscape as it is constructed and presented by the Park's staff, evaluated and experienced primarily by the Park's visitors, and engaged by all in Bodie. These categories serve as a heuristic device to

understand the process, but they also overlap: visitors interpret staff constructions, and, in part, through these interpretations, the symbolic work of construction becomes visible. Further, as visitors assess Bodie's authenticity, they necessarily assess the work of the staff in presenting the Park, and even our very presence in it. Visitors and staff interact on a daily and hourly basis, and the presentation, evaluation, and experience of authenticity are all ongoing processes.

Constructing and Presenting Authenticity

"Ghost towns," writes a guidebook author, "are fragile, they were put together with hope as much as with nails and boards" (Dallas 1985:4). But by visiting these towns today, guide-book authors and the public agree, we are able to recapture these hopes through landscape. As guide books explain, "the visitor can scuff through the ashes of old dreams," and "quest for dulled remnants of a lustier day" (Miller 1977:1; Florin 1963:7). It is important, in ghost towns, that these dreams be found in *ashes*, and that these remnants be *dulled*. In ghost towns, artifacts are expected to show signs of age and wear, and it is in large part this antiqued patina that lends a ghost town its authenticity (see Lowenthal 1975).

In Bodie, one commentator noted, "Repairs are made not merely with weathered wood and rusty nails but with the hasty techniques of mining-camp carpentry—no easy task for a serious craftsman" (Toll 1972: 21). Bodie's tarnished appearance is in part the result of more than a hundred years of harsh weather and decades of neglect. But in part also, as this commentator noticed, it is a conscious creation of a group of maintenance workers who attempt to faithfully carry out the State's policy of "arrested decay." Or, in the words of one staff member, "keep it standing but make it look like it's still falling down" (Figure 6). In Bodie, maintenance workers use contemporary materials and techniques when their work can be concealed from view, but try to use historic or historic-style materials and techniques when work is exposed. Thus, for example, maintenance workers use old-style square (or "cut") nails with rectangular (rather than round) heads to renail old siding, and replace broken glass with historic-style flat-poured glass with bubbles and wavy irregularities in it. Both the nails and the glass share the look of the original materials.

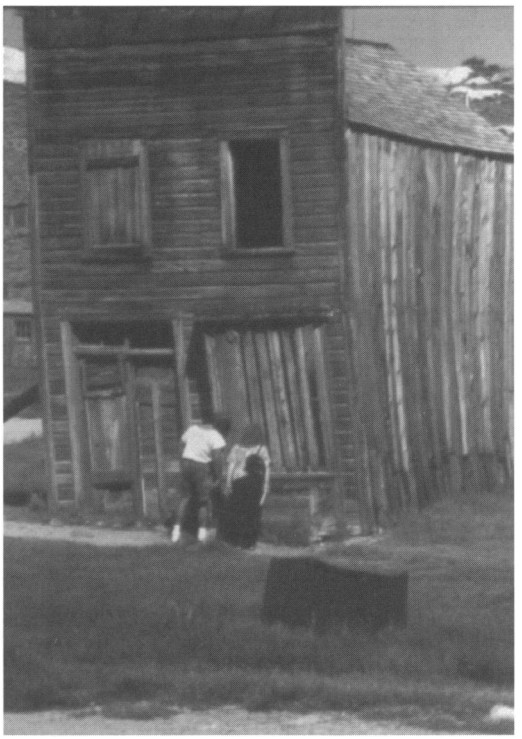

Figure 6. Bodie State Historic Park is preserved according to a policy known as "arrested decay," where buildings are stabilized but not restored. Their apparent frailty and tarnished appearance persuade visitors and staff of the Park's authenticity. Though this building, the Swazey Hotel, appears to be falling down, it actually got a new roof (shingled in the style of the old one) in the mid-1990s.

Even under the policy of arrested decay, however, what constitutes authenticity or a proper repair is not always clear and is sometimes contested. For example, when Bodie's Lester Bell house was reroofed, workers carefully removed and saved as much of the old rusted tin as possible to reuse on the new roof. When there was not enough, and new tin had to be added, we were distressed at the shiny appearance of the roof and so oxidized the tin with Coca-Cola to make it look more authentic, even though this was not part of our instructions for completing the job and had to be carried out on our own time. In another incident, workers repairing a large hole in the brick wall of the morgue ran courses of bricks at a downhill slope, careful to simulate the tendency of the existing bricks to

do so. When supervisors saw the work, however, they were dismayed that the courses of bricks were not level, as they would have been when the building was new, and ordered us to rip out the sloping bricks and begin again.

Such contests over authenticity cause tension among Bodie's staff and supervisors. But they also point to the emergent and contested nature of authenticity itself. As Edward Bruner notes, authenticity is not "a property inherent in an object, . . . [it is] a struggle, a social process in which competing interests argue for their own interpretation[s]" (1994:408). In Bodie, though an elaborate chain of command officially determines who has the power to define how authenticity will be constructed,[15] in practice, and with varying success, workers themselves resist and contest these constructions in favor of their own interpretations. But while this tension is uncomfortable to some Bodieites, the general public remains oblivious: the very naturalness of the appearance of authenticity in Bodie masks both its contestation and its construction. Bodie presents so impressive an image to some that they assume that staff members go to even greater lengths than they really do, to preserve the town's perceived authenticity. One young man approached me with great interest and asked, "How do you keep the grass [in the townsite] all one length?" Surprised, I replied that nobody did anything about the grass at all, and he added, "I was wondering how you maintained that authentic look. I guess it just does it by itself."

Thus, while Don Mitchell (1996) has noted that the mark of labor is often wiped from the landscape, in Bodie, traces of work in the landscape may in fact be exaggerated. And visitors in general certainly take great interest in what work is done to preserve the town. Anyone wearing nail bags or carrying a ladder becomes an easy mark for questions and comments about the Park's preservation policy that range from the inane (the frequently heard question while reshingling a roof: "What are you doing?") to the informed (questions about whether workers use wire or cut nails to hold siding in place), from the obsessive ("They didn't have screwguns back then!") to the anxious (questions about how many buildings were lost over a particularly harsh winter).

But mistaking the work involved in creating Bodie's authentic appearance implies not only the assumption that more work is done than actually is done. Most often, visitors overlook the work involved in creating the Park's so-called authentic ghost-town appearance. Many visitors fail to notice the work done to stabilize the buildings, even though the sound of power tools has become a commonplace. In fact, one of the most frequently asked of all visitor questions—"Are you going to restore this place?"—is often stated with the implication that no work whatsoever has yet been done. Others, who observe that work has, in fact, been done to preserve Bodie's buildings, are often confused about what such work looks like. For example, when a group of visitors from Orange County asked me about work done to preserve the buildings, they mistook the old siding on the front of the school house for new, while overlooking the brand new roof on a building across the street.

Others still, while vague about exactly what they perceive as work, are pleased that it is done: one man from San Diego told me, "I really want it to be the exact way it was [in the 1880s], but if you do nothing you lose it." He pointed to the roof of a run-down boarding house: "I'd like to think that that was the same roof that was on there when some miner lived in it but I know that it's not." And then, pointing to a building that had collapsed in the 1970s, he added, "And that if it were, then the building would look like that one." In fact, it is possible that the boarding house roof was original, and that the roof of the fallen-down building was not: this man made his own assumptions based on his visual observations, not on any actual knowledge of what work had been done on which buildings.[16] Work, it seems, cannot be totally obscured from Bodie's landscape: Even when it is masked or mistaken, its presence is often implied.

But the work done to maintain Bodie's authentic appearance goes beyond stabilizing building exteriors. And while the exterior work done may be observed or implied in a positive sense, work done on the interiors is hoped not to exist at all. Visitors often ask, astonished at the sheer quantity of artifacts inside Bodie's buildings, "Was all this stuff really just left here?" While the question implies that Bodie's interiors may have been arranged by Park staff members, the most common answer ("Yes. Everything you see in Bodie was left in Bodie") deflects that line of thought and replaces it with an implied reassurance that this was not the case. Dirt and dust accumulate rapidly in the wind-blown desert climate of Bodie, and the Park's policy of arrested decay currently mandates that neither

the artifacts nor the dust on top of them be disturbed, leaving the impression that they are "napped by generations of dust" (Sommerville Associates 1991:1). The overall appearance then, as one visitor explained, is that it's "natural, like it was left" (Figure 7).

Thus, the appearance of the dust enhances Bodie's air of authenticity, while dissuading visitors from the reality that many of these artifacts were actually arranged by the Park staff. In fact, part of the power of the policy of arrested decay is to naturalize itself, even for Bodie's staff: because they are currently prohibited from moving or arranging artifacts or from disturbing dust, many Bodie staff members assume that this was always the case and do not realize that, though the artifacts are original to Bodie, much of what they and the visitors view was arranged by previous staff members.

Because much of the artifice behind Bodie's authenticity is masked or misunderstood, many visitors see the Park as "unspoiled" or "natural" compared to other ghost towns. But why would the careful manicure of arrested decay appear natural? Both visitors and staff understand Bodie's authenticity in contrast to that of other ghost towns, and in particular in contrast to commercialized ghost towns like Virginia City, Nevada or Calico, California.

Compared to these other places, Bodie, with its unpainted, leaning buildings, appears frail. This very frailty of ghost towns is an important key to their appeal and perceived authenticity, for, as David Lowenthal has noted, "interest in the past causally connects to threats to its survival" (1975:33). In the case of mining towns, and therefore most ghost towns, this is particularly true. As Vale and Vale (1991) have noted, a prospering mining town concentrates repugnant activities (noise, toxic chemicals, air pollution, severe landscape alteration) that few would welcome in their backyards. Yet though reviled while they are booming, such towns are revered once they have failed: if a mining town sinks into ghost-town status, it becomes, like Bodie, a potentially attractive tourist destination (Francaviglia 1991). This is not unusual: as art historian Linda Nochlin (1989) has noted, cultural relics must often be on the brink of destruction before they can be seen as picturesque. And in ghost towns, the weather-beaten fragility of landscape elements reminds visitors of their precarious position just as it convinces viewers of their authenticity.

Figure 7. Visitors are often astonished at the abundance of artifacts they see when peering inside of Bodie's buildings. The natural appearance of the arrangement of Bodie's artifacts and the presence of undisturbed dust on top of them leads most visitors and staff to assume that this is precisely how the artifacts were found by the staff when Bodie became a Park in the 1960s.

Thus while fragility may imply threat or endangerment, in the case of ghost towns, endangerment is not necessarily seen in a negative light. In fact, some see the town's frailty as an important part of its educational mission: in the words of one staff member, "As much as I hate it that everyday I wake up and something's a little worse for wear in Bodie, . . . that's part of the thing . . .. If you know [that] it's disappearing maybe you'll pay more attention." Indeed, Bodie's endangerment and its authenticity as a ghost town are tightly linked: as one staff member explained, describing Bodie's dusty interiors, "Sometimes seeing the dust . . . which destroys things is kind of hard . . .. But as a true ghost town, those are the problems."

For visitors and staff, Bodie, with more than a hundred buildings filled with furniture and other discarded possessions, is seen as both endangered and also unique among ghost towns because so much of it survives and is preserved. As one visitor put it, "Generally you go to a ghost town and all you find [are] rusted cans." As a ghost town, Bodie State Historic Park must strike a balance between authenticity and oblivion.

Thus the appearance of authenticity itself is fragile, for it can easily be damaged. But to visitors and staff in Bodie, the threat to ghost towns comes not only from the ravages of time and vandals, but also from what they perceive as the other side: from the onslaught of commercialization. Authors of guidebooks and

the public alike are critical of ghost towns where restoration has lead to commercialization. In the Southern California ghost town of Calico, many of the buildings have been restored, several have been reproduced, and a number of others have been purely invented. All along Calico's main street, shops sell antiques, cotton candy, crafts, and souvenirs, leading one commentator to write that Calico is "unleavened awfulness . . . a meretricious flapdoodle" (Toll 1972:63). One young woman, visiting Bodie with her husband, told me, "We were just in Virginia City [Nevada] and Bodie is so much better. This isn't commercial. Over there, every time you walk into a building, somebody's trying to sell you something." Her husband concurred: "This is so much more authentic." A staff member agreed with them, and his complaint expressed Bodie's uniqueness as well as its endangered status: "There are so many of these Virginia Cities around . . .. There the buildings are all painted-up, fixed-up, beautiful buildings with everybody trying to sell everything from T-shirts to hot dogs." Threatened from two sides, Bodie State Historic Park clings to authenticity as a "true ghost town."

Commercialization, according to staff and visitors, detracts from the ghost-town experience because it interferes with their ability to imagine life in another time. Another staff member explained that he found Bodie authentic "because of the way it is saved and preserved. In Virginia City, with neon and T-shirts, it's hard to get an idea of what it might have been." Similarly, I spoke with two couples visiting Bodie together who told me they had been to many ghost towns. When they said they were headed north, I asked them if they were going to go to Virginia City. "Oh no," replied one of the men, "that's much too commercial for me." "Yeah, it's full of shops that sell trinkets and stuff," added his wife. "It's too commercial." When I asked them if they'd been to Calico, that too generated a negative response: "That's just for tourists," said the husband. "It's all commercial. [But] here [in Bodie] you can see things the way they really were."

Thus Bodie's policy of arrested decay and lack of commercialism persuades both visitors and staff of the Park's authenticity.

A Presentation, and an Interpretation

On a summer Sunday in 1994, Bodie park volunteer Carl Jackson,[17] standing at the town's main intersection,[18] gave a history talk to a group of about forty visitors. Attempting to debunk the mythic West, Jackson explained that W. S. Bodey, the town's founder, was not a heroic success but a pitiful failure who never saw the wealth he had discovered. Jackson further pointed out that women, even prostitutes, were seldom allowed in Bodie's saloons. But Jackson also told animated stories and details about life in the town during the boom period. He described one man's lynching, and the exhumation and display of Bodey's skull in the Miner's Union Hall. He told his audience that everything from "perfume to heavy equipment" was available in Bodie's general stores, and that twenty-five cents bought a good dinner that might even include such exotic fare as pineapples or oysters. He complicated that picture by telling of the stench of raw sewage that permeated the town, and of the frequent discoveries, during the spring thaw, of no-longer-frozen animal carcasses. He described the sight of dozens of hoist works that once lined the mining area of Bodie Bluff above the townsite, and the pollution of the Bodie bowl by the smoke from their boilers.

Then he pointed to the empty spaces visitors saw around them, and described for each what sort of building had been located there during Bodie's boom period. He pointed to the buildings nearby and described for the visitors their boom-period uses. Some visitors may have noticed that only two of the uses he described corresponded with the way these buildings were currently set up, or with the names for the buildings given in the Park's self-guided tour brochure. He also pointed out that many of Bodie's buildings had been picked up and moved, long after the boom, to their current locations. Subtly, he implied that what visitors now saw was not the Bodie of the nineteenth century. Jackson's intention was not to have undermined the authenticity of this gold-mining ghost town, but to enrich it, to help create for the visitors an experience not based solely on the mythic West but informed by Bodie's complex 135-year history. For him, Bodie was the most authentic ghost town he knew of, but authenticity did not mean a mimetic reflection of the mythic West. Near the end of his talk, he drove his point home: "There is no better gold

town than this one. Most have a yogurt shop and a video store. This is the real thing."

Jackson was not referring to "the real thing" in Umberto Eco's sense of the term where a "real" ghost town is a pure fabrication (1986).[19] Nor did he have in mind the naïve authenticity that would equate a visit to Bodie State Historic Park in the 1990s with a trip to Bodie the gold mining town in the 1880s, or to the "real life" version of a Clint Eastwood movie. He had developed his own notion of what authenticity meant in the context of a ghost town, and he attempted to convey that to the visitors who attended his talk. It is likely that his listeners, before his talk, had their own notions of what authenticity meant. But Jackson's comparison of Bodie's contemporary landscape to its landscape in 1880 did not undermine visitors' understanding of Bodie as an authentic ghost town. Indeed, as Gable and Handler observed in Colonial Williamsburg, the confession of minor inaccuracies serves to underscore the Park's overall claim to authenticity, rather than to undermine it (Gable and Handler 1993; Handler and Gable 1997). Jackson's confession of the inaccuracy of a few minor details implied, not further inaccuracies elsewhere, but rather the total authenticity of the rest of Bodie's landscape. In his talk, Jackson presented himself as somewhat of an expert on Bodie's history, and his implicit critique of the Park's brochure and the current set-up of some of the buildings served to reinforce this claim to expert status rather than to undermine the Park's authenticity: Jackson's detailed and encyclopedic knowledge drew questions from his audience that tested or reaffirmed that knowledge but effectively disallowed questions about the nature of the exhibits themselves. By drawing attention to minor details, he dissuaded visitors from questioning the accuracy, authenticity, or even plausibility of the overall picture (see Handler and Gable 1997).

Jackson, the volunteer lecturer, had based his tale of Bodie's history, and indeed his notions of Bodie's authenticity, on his own extensive research into the town's past. But the members of his audience that day, and indeed most visitors to Bodie, do not share Jackson's background knowledge and so base their understanding largely on clues they find in the landscape.[20] And that landscape, contrary to Jackson's urging, calls forth images of the mythic West familiar to visitors from film and television. One ghost-town guide-book author spoke for many of the visitors I interviewed when he wrote that "the frail ghost towns" constitute "one of the few visible reminders of the West's brief past[, . . . of] the rollicking individualistic spirit of the frontier [that] has come to seem an antidote to urban grayness" (Carter 1971:7).

Thus, authenticity, in a ghost town, is tied to an aged and weather-beaten look and to anti-commercialism. The restoration of buildings, and the signs of on-going life and business, interfere with visitors' attempts to imagine the town in its height, to imagine the past. Indeed, as we shall see, by engaging with the notion of authenticity, visitors and staff alike are able to see beyond Bodie's artifacts to what Bodie's landscape cannot literally present: the lives of those who lived in Bodie in the past. By engaging with the notion of authenticity, then, visitors are able to "see" the imagined past. But before examining this experience in more detail, it is important to understand that Bodie's visitors do not accept the Park's authenticity naively. Though Bodie has the requisite weather-worn, noncommercial appearance, and though Bodie's staff, through their arrests of decay and in their answers to questions, present a compelling construction of authenticity, visitors question and assess the Park's authenticity before they believe it.

Evaluating and Experiencing Authenticity

As sociologist Erik Cohen has pointed out, the question is not "whether the individual does or does not 'really' have an authentic experience . . . , but rather, what endows his [or her] experience with authenticity in his [or her] own view?" (Cohen 1988:378; Figure 8). As indicated above, one way visitors evaluate authenticity in Bodie is by asking questions of staff members. For the summer staff,[21] these questions may seem repetitive, since they are asked literally hundreds of times every day. But for individual visitors, each question and its answer are new, and the very fact of their questioning reveals the ways in which they are thinking about and evaluating Bodie. The query, "Was all this stuff really just left here?" can come in a tone of astonishment or one of accusatory disbelief. The question, "Are you going to restore this place?" can imply that the asker hasn't noticed the work already done or that any restoration work that might be done in the future will ruin

Figure 8. Even on crowded summer days like this one, visitors do not accept Bodie's authenticity uncritically. Peering inside Bodie's buildings, examining their exteriors, and talking with staff members, visitors weigh the Park's authenticity for themselves.

the place. But the answer given by all the Park staff (with varying wording) to this second question serves to reassure, and to buttress Bodie's authenticity: "The philosophy that we espouse here is 'arrested decay,' . . . restoration implies that it's all going to be fixed up and made pretty and painted like back to the way it was . . .. No, no, we don't 'restore'—we do try to maintain it."

Asking questions of staff members is a critical way that Bodie's visitors assess the Park's authenticity, but so, ironically, is the physical presence of the staff members. Nearly all staff members live in Bodie at least seasonally, in eight houses that look, from the outside, like all the other houses in Bodie save for the presence of weathered wooden signs with old-timey lettering that read "Employee's Residence" or "Ranger's Residence." While some visitors are angered or irritated by the presence of the staff —because for them it damages the Park's authenticity as a ghost town—most are intrigued. "Do you really live here?" is one of the most commonly heard questions, so much so that its answer ("Yes, I live here") is emblazoned on the annual staff T-shirts. And for these visitors, the very condition of the staff residences attests to the authenticity of the whole Park. In fact, many visitors so wholeheartedly embrace Bodie's authenticity that they project the "authentic" living conditions of the nineteenth century onto Bodie's twentieth-century inhabitants: their follow-up question "What do you do for fun?" or "What do you do at night [when the Park is closed]?" is often interrupted by their own Lincoln-in-a-log-cabin-inspired answer, "You must get a lot of reading done," or interjected with, "You have to adjust your habits to be more like they used to be. Live more like they used to live."

This process of evaluation can be seen very clearly through a typical exchange between a group of visitors (in this case, two young couples with babies) and a Park staff member (myself). These visitors, who saw me locking the door to the house I was living in, approached me directly and eagerly with a series of questions. They asked if I lived in Bodie. They asked when the fires were that they presumed had destroyed the town. They asked if all the things in the buildings had really been left in Bodie. They

asked about the work we (the staff) did to the buildings, specifically about what sort of restoration work we did, and to which buildings we had done it already. They made some guesses about the work that we had done, and they were wrong. They asked about our lives in Bodie, especially about what we did at night. They were disdainful about the other ghost towns they had been to because they thought those places (Calico, California, Virginia City, Nevada, and Tombstone, Arizona) were "just for tourists" or "too commercial." What they were doing was weighing Bodie's authenticity for themselves—when I saw them, they had not yet decided if they thought Bodie was "authentic" or not; they needed their questions answered first. Was it the staff of the Park who brought in all the artifacts, built the buildings, and then made everything look old? Or was the stuff exactly as it had been left by the last inhabitants who abandoned their town after a devastating fire? Did the Park staff change the looks of the buildings or add new ones? Or did we just try to keep things the way they had been left? Further, did the Park staff live in the formerly abandoned buildings, and did we therefore share the hardships of the Bodieites who came before us? These people believed that the other ghost towns they mentioned were *not* authentic, were figuring out if Bodie *was*, and they included the contemporary staff as part of Bodie.

Of course, since many of Bodie's staff members are heavily vested in the Park's authenticity as a ghost town, the answers they give to visitor questions may sway impressions. For example, when visitors ask, as they often do, if Bodie's staff have television, the staff members generally answer "No," but this is not quite literally the case. Contemporary residents of Bodie do not have access to cable television, are not permitted to have exterior antennae for their TVs because they would be a modern intrusion inconsistent with Park policy, and can get no television reception with inside antennae. So while, strictly speaking, residents do not have TV, by the late 1990s, nearly all the residences in Bodie had televisions and VCRs in them, and many Bodieites watched movies or recorded television programs on a regular basis. But answering no to the TV question preserves the impression that today's Bodieites live a primitive life, more like people in the past, and thus defends the Park's authenticity.[22]

If staff members at times carefully guard authenticity, many visitors do so as well. In fact, Bodie's authenticity is often enhanced in the photographs or video footage they take home with them. One man told me, "Here [in Bodie] I can get a picture of a building without people in day-glow shorts. You have to be patient but you can do it." He and thousands of other visitors to Bodie often wait many minutes in front of a popular building like Bodie's Methodist Church for a moment when no strangers fill their camera's field of view. Thus, the photographs and videos disguise the crowded and touristic reality of many summer days to portray Bodie as a dusty, abandoned ghost town.

It is the hand-in-glove interplay between Bodie's policy of arrested decay and its noncommercial appearance that creates the impression of authenticity for visitors. As one staff member explained it, "commercialization comes as a partner to restoration. And then you lose the ghost-town atmosphere." While in Colonial Williamsburg, for example, both meticulous restoration and tasteful commercialization are mustered to create a sense of authenticity (Handler and Gable 1997), in the world of ghost towns, where visitors expect to see abandonment and decay, both commercialization and restoration are negatives.

Indeed, this is the case at other historic sites as well. When Nuala Johnson studied Strokestown Park House in Ireland, she found that it was "precisely the used appearance of the furniture and interior fabrics that [made] it seem as though [visitors were] viewing the house through contemporary [that is to say, period] eyes" (1996: 563). Visitors to Bodie have similar experiences in the presence of the used and worn artifacts displayed there, and nearly all objects in Bodie are presumed to date from Bodie's boom period in the 1880s, rather than from, say, the 1920s, or any other period before the town's abandonment in the 1950s.[23] Of course, some visitors and some of the staff possess expert knowledge about period artifacts and are able to identify and date many objects. But interestingly, even the objects in Bodie that are clearly from a later period do not detract from visitors' interpretations of the 1880s, as long as they are not seen as "modern." Thus, visitors frequently pose for a photograph in front of the Park's 1927 Graham stake-bed truck, which has a sign, identifying its year and make, wired to its front bumper (Figure 9). As long as artifacts

Figure 9. Despite the presence of newer artifacts like this 1927 Graham, visitors quickly return to their interpretations of 1880s Bodie. As long as artifacts in Bodie show signs of age and wear and predate the presence of California State Park Rangers (who arrived in 1962), they are accepted as an authentic part of the ghost town.

display signs of age and wear, and as long as they predate the presence of California State Park Rangers (who first arrived in 1962), visitors accept them as authentic. This is even true of much newer artifacts like my beat-up 1960 Chevy pick-up, which is also often the subject of photographs when it is parked in the townsite.[24] But though they know that these trucks are newer, visitors quickly shift their focus back to Bodie's boom period once presented with artifacts of a less certain time of manufacture. For example, one young man, traveling with his wife and young daughter, told me that what he liked about Bodie was that,

> It's a different era. I enjoy looking inside the buildings and seeing all the old stuff. From the outside they all start to look the same but on the inside they're all very different. You start to see how they lived. You can see that they had all kinds of stuff that you didn't think they had back then, like Campbell's soup and stuff. And you think that life really wasn't that hard or that much different back then.

This man, like many others, used an artifact from a later period (the cans in this case were probably from the 1940s[25]) to interpret the 1880s, and to link that time period with his own life. Through these aged and worn artifacts, visitors, like this man, say they can see what life was like in Bodie in the past, and they link that to their own lives in the present.

While this man drew on an artifact to understand life in the past as easier than he thought it was, for most visitors and the staff was well, Bodie's artifacts suggest the difficult past. I spoke with two young women from Los Angeles who told me, one at the urging of the other, that visiting Bodie was like "peeking into the past. Into the way people used to live, and how they had to do things. Like you couldn't just turn on a burner." An elderly man agreed: this was his first visit to Bodie and he said it was "well worth it." What fascinated him, he told me, was that he could "see how they left stuff—the dishes on the table."

Thus Bodie's dust and decay, combined with the town's lack of commercialism, invite visitors and staff to indulge in the notion that what they see is exactly as it was left by the town's last inhabitants, that they are peering directly into the lives of the past, and therefore that Bodie is an authentic ghost town. One man from the San Francisco Bay Area (ironically, standing at the site of one of Bodie's boom-period breweries) put it like this: "This *is* a ghost town. I think you get a better feel here for life 110 years ago. It's easier for me to imagine. You know, if you have a microbrewery right next door it makes it harder! . . . [Here] you really get a feel for things, like just by seeing the size of the buildings, and for the way they're situated. It's in a state of deterioration . . . [and] I think that helps me to imagine. If it's to modern code then you don't get a feeling for how hard life was." By indulging in notions of the difficult past, this visitor, and numerous others like him, engage also in the notion of progress: American society's progress from a more primitive and difficult past, one of the most powerful narratives that the ghost town of Bodie presents. Through tarnished artifacts, the past appears harder than the present, and the narrative of progress is made experientially real.

But, as David Lowenthal reminds us, "Because we feel that old things should look old, we may forget that they originally looked new" (1975:26). Bodie today has only one building with a significant amount of paint on it. But during the town's boom, all of its wooden buildings were painted, and many decorated with ornate Victorian gingerbread. In the 1880s, the town attempted to present a look of established prosperity. Bodie today has only two sites of business, the entrance station outside the townsite where the admission fee is charged, and the museum where brochures and books are sold. During its boom, Bodie had at least six general stores, numerous specialized merchants, two banks, a Wells Fargo Express office, and three daily newspapers. The town's Main Street was lined with as many as sixty-five saloons and dance halls. Near the saloons was an entire red-light district and one of the largest "Chinatowns" in California. There were restaurants, bakeries, hotels, lodging houses, and at least three breweries. During its heyday, then, Bodie was well-maintained and intensely commercial.[26] But today, in order for visitors and staff to experience that time, Bodie must look worn, dilapidated, and free of commercial operations.

It may seem paradoxical then, that by making Bodie look less like it was during its heyday (or simply by keeping it that way), visitors and staff feel that Bodie looks *more* like it was "back then." The very authenticity they seek in the ghost town of Bodie is precisely what would have made it *inauthentic* as a nineteenth-century mining camp in the nineteenth century. As Bruner observed during his field work in the reconstructed village where Abraham Lincoln once lived, "to the degree that the houses look weathered they are more credible to visitors but are a less accurate reproduction of the [period]" (1994:402). This is not a contradiction if we understand authenticity as a socially constructed concept that holds different meanings for different people, in different times, and in different places. What appears authentic in the ghost town of Bodie in the 1990s may not have appeared authentic in the mining town of Bodie in the 1880s. What appears authentic in a ghost town may not appear authentic in a Colonial-period outdoor museum like Williamsburg. But visitors to Bodie, like the Park volunteer I quoted at length earlier, develop a notion of authenticity that is specific to ghost towns, and in some cases, specific to Bodie.

In the context of Bodie, visitors disqualified the authenticity of any ghost town they perceived as artificial or commercial, as many of my informants did with Virginia City and Calico. But in the sense of authenticity that involves exact trueness to the period represented, Bodie, Virginia City, and Calico may be equally inauthentic: it is unlikely that miners from Bodie in the 1880s would recognize any of these ghost towns as authentic representations of the towns they knew. Nevertheless, the lack of commercialism and the signs of age and wear confirm Bodie's authenticity in the sense that it is a version of the past that is credible to the Park's 1990s visitors. In Bodie, then, authenticity is a construction of the present: of the 1990s in the 1990s, not of the 1880s in the 1990s, and it represents our contemporary interpretations of the past (Bruner 1994). As Lowenthal (1985:xxiii) has pointed out, "[i]t is not the original that seems authentic, but current views of what the past ought to have looked like."

But in Western ghost towns, authenticity is not merely a construction of the present, for different ghost towns are seen by the public as

authentic to different degrees. The public views authenticity as a case of "more" or "less" (Gable and Handler 1993). Bodie is more authentic, Virginia City and Calico are less so. Understanding authenticity on a linear scale or in terms of a rank order, however, masks its contested and constructed nature. Instead of interpreting different ghost towns as more or less authentic, perhaps a more nuanced stance is to view them as competing—or simply different—versions of the past (Bruner 1994). The fact that Bodie is seen by many as "more authentic" obscures the fact that its very authenticity is actively created in an ongoing manner by the Park's staff, and actively participated in by the visitors. These attributes of authenticity mask its constructed nature.

Nonetheless, because Bodie is perceived as an authentic ghost town, visitors can freely indulge in an experience of the past as they wish to perceive it. One man from San Bernardino put it this way:

> [Calico is] like Disneyland. You know, Knott's' Berry farm runs it . . .. They still do have some original stuff but you really have to use your imagination hard. Here [in Bodie] you can really feel [the past]. I can walk down [Main Street] and just hear the horses and the people. [I can] just use [my] imagination, and I have a good one, and I'm right there [in the 1880s].

Using Bodie's authenticity as a vehicle, visitors transcend what they literally see to indulge in narratives about the mythic West, progress, and American virtues.

Conclusion: Engaging Authenticity

Is Bodie State Historic Park an authentic ghost town? It once was a real gold-mining town, and what remains of that town today stands little altered. No building has been reproduced, no fallen building has ever been resurrected, no new buildings of any kind have ever been added within the townsite. Furthermore, no building has been restored, repainted, or repaired to look new again. Finally, no store sells souvenirs, and no saloon sells sarsaparilla. But does this make Bodie authentic as a ghost town? The answer, according to most of Bodie's staff and visitors, is Yes. To some others, however, the question borders on the absurd or the inane. If authenticity is either socially constructed or in the eyes of the beholder, how can this reveal anything of relevance for geographers or social theorists? But the issues of interest go beyond querying whether Bodie (or any other ghost town) is, is not, or ever can be authentic. Rather, we might ask, how does Bodie's landscape lead visitors to assess authenticity? What does it mean to say visitors and staff *do* consider Bodie authentic? How does accepting Bodie's authenticity enable visitors to engage with narratives about the past, and what do those narratives evoke?

Weather-beaten buildings, tarnished artifacts, and lack of commercialism lead visitors and staff to dub Bodie an authentic ghost town. And beyond that, the landscape and artifacts of the Park, like the commodities in the Mall of America studied by Jon Goss, "are the vehicles of narratives that unite individual biography with . . . cultural history" (Goss 1999:47, see also Stewart 1984). Once the artifacts and landscape are deemed authentic, the narrative of the mythic West and Anglo American virtues can be engaged.

But whose narrative is this? And who does this narrative leave out? Western historian Patricia Limerick (1994) has observed that, although she and other New Western historians have attempted to write a more inclusive Western history, one that looks beyond the concept of a white man's westward-moving frontier to include the contributions of women, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians, nevertheless, the popular imagery of the frontier remains mired in Anglo American hegemony. Limerick writes (1994:95), "in the late *twentieth* century, the scholarly understanding formed in the late *nineteenth century* still governs most of the public rhetorical uses of the word 'frontier . . . '". Just like the related concept of the frontier, images of the mythic West continue to present an Anglo American version of the past.

As James Duncan has pointed out (1990), landscapes, because they are part of the taken-for-granted, obscure the ideological nature of their form and content. While Marita Sturken (1997:13) asserts that social memory "reveals the demand for a less monolithic, more inclusive America," in the ghost town of Bodie, these images of the past are *not* inclusive. The narratives of the mythic West, of Anglo American virtues, and of progress verify a patriarchal,

middle-class Anglo American construction of American culture, values, and morals. In other words, what the majority of Bodie's visitors and staff find in Bodie is a place that confirms their already-held beliefs in the dominant American culture. In an age when this hegemony is perceived to be increasingly threatened by multiculturalism and political correctness (Berube 1994), visitor and staff interpretations of Bodie's past echo the hegemonic values.

In the ghost town of Bodie, the concept of authenticity enables visitors to experience the past as they imagine it. Signs of age and wear remind them of the endangered state of that past, and of notions of progress from a difficult past (Figure 10). Visitors know they are not walking down the streets of 1880s-Bodie, but they feel that by gazing upon the ruins, they can experience the whole; that by looking upon the tarnished remains of the past, they can experience that past.

Authenticity is not the end result of a visit to Bodie. Rather, it is a vehicle through which the narratives of the mythic West, of progress and American virtues, are made tangible and believable to visitors. As Bruner (1994:398) has noted, the experiences of visitors to Lincoln's New Salem "go well beyond a search for authenticity."

Thus, many visitors muster Bodie's tarnished authenticity as a window on the past, and use it also as a lesson for themselves about the present. One Southern Californian explained what he learned from visiting Bodie:

> One of the big draws [of Bodie] is that you can get something of an idea of how the person who is not the big shot [lived] . . .. I try to find out what life was like really [and you don't get that] by going to mansions . . .. You don't get an idea by looking at movies . . .. These are middle-class homes. I consider myself middle class, and yet I wouldn't live here. Just imagine what kind of places a lot of the miners lived in . . .. We get mad if the freeway's blocked up, or if the power's out even for one day.

Through the harsh conditions he perceived in Bodie, he admired the hardy citizens of the past. Some of Bodie's visitors use their perceived past as a lesson for their children. One man, peering with his family into the windows of an especially small cabin, told his son, "and you complain about sharing a room with your sister? . . . Imagine if you had to live here with your whole family!" In the primitive past, children not only shared bedrooms with their siblings, but shared one-room cabins with their entire families. The moral, of course, is that, because of American society's progress, this man's children no longer have to.

The ghost town of Bodie is, for its visitors and for its staff, a place of artifactual identification with the past. Objects in Bodie trigger feelings and fantasies. They evoke chains of ideas and images that lead far beyond their initial starting point in the artifacts themselves. Historian Ludmilla Jordanova (1989:25) has pointed out that when we, as viewers, interpret objects in museums (or, by extension, in ghost towns) we both reify them and identify with them. Because we can identify with them we allow them to "generate memories, associations, [and] fantasies." Through these objects, then, we experience or feel our constructions of the past.

This is true of Bodie's visitors who "hear the horse and buggies" of the 1880s, just as it is true of Bodie's staff who present that past to the visitors. But these journeys cannot be seen merely as imaginative excursions into the spurious past, triggered purely artifactually. As Jordanova points out, along with the artifactual, they have strong intellectual components, for it is our intellectual abilities, not the artifacts themselves, that allow us to draw abstractions from artifacts, to read the difficult past from a wood-burning cook stove.

Just the same, in places like Bodie State Historic Park, visitors and staff alike are invited to believe that it is the artifacts themselves that lead to the "experience" of the past. While Jordanova is critical of those who believe that insight can be gleaned from such objects, most of Bodie's visitors and staff would disagree. Both insist that because of the policy of arrested decay and the lack of commercialism, and thus because of the ghost town's apparent authenticity, they are able to see, to feel, and to experience the Old West in Bodie. But this does not indicate that Jordanova's reasoning is flawed, nor that Bodie's staff and visitors do not know their own feelings. Indeed, perhaps the most powerful experiences of Bodie are those triggered by the artifacts, the imaginative experiences that Bodie's landscape inspires. Abstract concepts may not be what people can directly see by looking at artifacts, but, for visitors and staff in Bodie, such concepts are what they say they see. Experiences that begin by seeing the artifacts are no less powerful or real because the

Figure 10. For visitors to experience Bodie's bustling past, the town's present must appear dilapidated and free of commercial operations. Indeed, perhaps the most powerful experiences for Bodie's visitors and staff are those triggered by the artifacts, the imaginative experiences of the past that Bodie's landscape inspires. Here, coffins arranged in Bodie's "morgue" remind visitor's of the harsh life of the past.

abstractions are not experienced through the artifacts directly, but through the imagination.

By engaging with Bodie's authenticity, visitors and staff undo the distancing of nostalgia (see Stewart 1984). Feelings of loss and longing are supplanted, through engagement with familiar artifacts of the past, by feelings of continuity and connection. As Bodie's American visitors link themselves and their lives in the present to the past they perceive in Bodie, they move closer to, rather than farther away from, the past they perceive, connecting themselves and their lives in the present to the mythic West in American social memory, not nostalgically distancing themselves from the imagined past.

In Bodie, meaning is made in the minds of staff and visitors, triggered by artifacts and landscape, and linked to images of the mythic West, of progress and Anglo American virtues. The concept of authenticity, of the veracity of the viewed, allows visitors and staff at Bodie State Historic Park to believe the narratives the landscape presents, and to indulge in popularly held notions of the mythic West evoked by Bodie's false-fronted Main Street and dilapidated miners' cabins. Thus, the concept of authenticity allows visitors to make a jump from the visible and the tangible, to the invisible and the experiential; from a buckled boardwalk to a horse and buggy, and ultimately to resourceful and courageous pioneering forebears.[27]

The particular pasts that visitors imagine in a place like Bodie likely never existed. But, as Bruner (1994:411) reminds us, historic sites "do provide visitors with the . . . experiences . . . to construct a sense of identity [and] meaning."

In the mid-1950s, when representatives of the California Division of Beaches and Parks proposed the acquisition of the town of Bodie, they described a town "yellowed with age, [with buildings in] various degrees of picturesque dilapidation . . .. [all] stamped with the seal of authenticity" (Newlin 1955). And indeed, most contemporary visitors to Bodie State Historic Park would agree.

On a weekday in July 1996, I spoke with a woman who told me she had been to Bodie before, ten or fifteen years ago, and had been afraid to return because she thought it might now be "spoiled" by commercialization. Heading back to her car in the parking lot, she was very happy that in her opinion it had not been spoiled. And then, almost as if she had read the words of the representatives of the Division of Beaches and Parks written nearly fifty years before, she summed up her Bodie experience:

"This is the essence of America," she told me, "The pioneers."

The concept of authenticity ties visitors to what is not literally in Bodie's landscape: to a mythic West of the imagination. For visitors and staff, Bodie's perceived authenticity is a vehicle through which they can experience a fantasy past that may never have been, but that nevertheless holds meaning for each person who imagines it.

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Notes

1. In quotations from the state records here and later, I have retained all the idiosyncrasies of usage and punctuation in the original document.
2. While Bodie's policy of arrested decay is perhaps an extreme example, California State Park policy has always favored stabilization and preservation

whenever possible over restoration or reconstruction, mirroring similar policies by the National Park Service and other federal agencies, and in contrast to the restoration aesthetic of the house-museum movement among private conservationists. At the time Bodie was acquired by the state, the gold-mining town of Columbia on the Western side of the Sierras was already a State Historic Park, and many of its buildings had been restored to "approximate their appearance prior to the decline of the town in the 1860s" (V. Aubrey Neasham, quoted in Hata 1992:35). In acquiring Bodie, the Department sought to broaden its American-period holdings, to preserve what they determined a valuable historical site, and to establish a Park with an emphasis and aesthetic different from that at Columbia. If the expected experiences of visitors to Bodie seem far-fetched, they are comparable to those expected for visitors to historic sites in the National Park Service, which were intended to promote patriotism: "In a time of deep crisis, the survival of our Nation may depend on our knowledge and appreciation of the hardships, sacrifices, and ideals of our forefathers" (National Park Service, *National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings* [1959], quoted in Hata 1992:107). Readers with an interest in preservation policy and the institutional designation of Bodie as a Park can consult Bodie State Historic Park (1955–1999); California Department of Parks and Recreation (1973); California Public Outdoor Recreation Plan Committee (1970); Hata (1992); Hosmer (1965); Hosmer (1981); Office of Historic Preservation (1997); Wallace (1981); Weeks and Grimmer (1995).

3. This is not to say that others have paid no heed to landscape: Gable and Handler (1993) and Handler and Gable (1997) examined the influence of specific landscape elements on visitor perceptions of authenticity at Colonial Williamsburg, and their work has been influential to me.
4. An entirely different approach was taken by psychologists Donna Morganstern and Jeff Greenberg: they attempted to resolve the problem by offering tickets in a prize drawing to respondents to their survey of a Western movie set/ghost town (1988).
5. Of course, ghost towns are not the only historic sites that communicate such morally charged messages about America's past. Other restored, reconstructed, or preserved places, such as Henry Ford's Greenfield Village and John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg, became museums or public places specifically with the motive of conveying such moral messages. But while Bodie and other ghost towns are not unique here, it should be noted that historians and other scholars of historic preservation have largely overlooked ghost towns in favor of house museums, open-air museums, and historic districts (see Barthel 1996; Murtagh 1997; Wallace 1981; for a brief exception, see Lowenthal 1985).
6. Some of those who lived in Bodie in the 1920s or 1930s, for example, relocated rather frequently, moving to different houses as the expediencies of rent and repair demanded.
7. In a treeless area like Bodie, firewood was always at a premium. During the town's boom period, theft of firewood was one of the more common crimes (McGrath 1984).
8. The Park's self-guided tour brochure strongly extends these notions about the town's past, as it presents a town of male-headed white-collar or entrepreneurial families through their homes and businesses. The brochure further projects the predominantly white visitorship of Bodie into the town's past: Chinese, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans are represented largely off stage by references beyond the townsite. For more on the brochure and the past it presents, see DeLyser (1998).
9. In summer, some 25 percent of visitors are Western Europeans (especially Germans, but also Italians, French, Dutch, and British). While Bodie's appearance is familiar to them, and while many of the same conclusions may apply to them, this study examines only American visitors.
10. Regional views of the West include: Meinig (1972), Webb (1931 [1971], and White (1991). Interpreters of the mythic West include Athearn (1986); Brownlow (1979); Bruce (1990); Buscombe (1988); Limerick (1994); McWilliams (1931); Nash (1991); Slotkin (1992); D. Smith (1967); H. N. Smith (1950), and White (1991); some, like White, interpret both.
11. See White (1991, 621-23) for a discussion of the domestication of white male violence in the mythic West, and the romanticization of the Western outlaw.
12. It is interesting to note that early Western films continued the conflation of western reality with Western myth, as the stars were often either former lawmen or former outlaws. In one incident, former outlaw Arkansas Tom Doolin and former marshal Bud Ledbetter were each playing themselves for former Marshal William Tilghman's 1915 production, *The Passing of the Oklahoma Outlaws*. They were shooting on location in Chandler, Oklahoma when notorious bankrobber Henry Starr and his gang pulled off a double bank robbery in the nearby town of Stroud. Tilghman got news of the incident, rushed from the set to the scene of the crime, and managed to arrest the three bank robbers. The captured criminals were brought to Chandler, and Tilghman ordered his cameraman to film the group, including the wounded Starr. Starr later started his own movie company, which shot a movie on location in Stroud about the famous double

bank robbery for which Tilghman had resumed the role of Marshal (Brownlow 1979). Sometimes the mythic and the historic West have become extraordinarily intertwined. And as this happened, the boundaries between the real and the unreal, between myth and reality, became less distinct (Nash 1991).

13. Numerous guidebooks describe Western ghost towns. Two particularly detailed examples are Florin 1993 and Murbarger 1956. Further discussions of mining landscapes and the growth and decline of mining towns (in some cases including Bodie) can be found in Aschman (1970); Barth (1975); Francaviglia (1991); Kersten (1964); and Starrs (1984).
14. In recent years, Bodie has received a good deal of publicity both within the state of California and nationwide. Examples of articles trumpeting the town's "authenticity" include Katis (1994) (in the *Boston Globe*); Warren (1995) (in the *San Jose Mercury News*); Webb (1995) (in *Westways*); Drabelle 1993 (in the *Washington Post*). Some visitors arrive in Bodie aware of the Park's reputation for authenticity: for example, one man told me, "They say Bodie's the best ghost town west of the Mississippi River. I don't know what's east of it, but that's what they say. I think so."
15. Maintenance workers in Bodie do not make decisions alone on how to carry out repairs. Decisions are carried out through a chain of command that runs from maintenance workers, to their individual crew chief, crew chief's supervisor, district-level supervisor, district Chief, and on to higher state levels that can include architects and archaeologists based in Sacramento. Where in the ladder a decision will be reached depends on the extent of the project.
16. Though it is probably true that no building in Bodie has not had some work done to stabilize it, it is still not uncommon for workers to find newspapers from the 1880s or 1890s under old shingles, indicating that the shingles (and hence the roof) are also that old.
17. A pseudonym.
18. He stood at the corner of Main and Green streets, the contemporary main intersection. Actually, during Bodie's boom period, the town's main intersection was about two blocks further north, but a catastrophic fire in 1932 burned most of the buildings in that area, leaving empty land, which scarcely creates the impression of a main intersection for today's visitors.
19. Eco wrote about the ghost-town amusement park at Knott's Berry Farm in Orange County, California. There buildings assembled from scratch or moved from other locations are presented as the remnants of a gold-mining town, or possibly as a composite of many gold-mining towns, neither of which is actually the case. Walter Knott's construction prompted one observer to dub him the "Dr. Frankenstein of the ghost town business," (Toll 1972:63) but Knott constructed his ghost town in order to convey what he considered was the essence of American pioneer character, which to him could be observed in such places. Commenting on the result, Eco wrote that while some American ghost towns are "reasonably authentic" because the "restoration or preservation has been carried out on an extant, 'archaeological' urban complex," the ones that are "more interesting are those [like Knott's] born from nothing, out of pure imitative determination. They are the 'real thing'" (1986: 40). (For information on Walter Knott and his ghost town, see Knott 1965; Kooiman 1973; Nygaard 1965.)
20. Only a small percentage of Bodie's visitors attend history talks or tours. Most are assisted by the Park's self-guided tour brochure. Though the brochure's text provides a good deal of information about past inhabitants and the history of the town, it is presented as a building-by-building, site-by-site walking tour of the townsite, which further encourages visitors to draw on Bodie's landscape for information about the past and the Park's authenticity (see DeLyser 1998).
21. In winter, when snow closes the road to the Park, there are few visitors, and a small staff of four or five. In the busy tourist season, the staff swells to around 15 and as many as 1500 people may visit the museum on any given day (during the period of my research, recording visitors to the museum was the only way individual visitors to the Park were counted).
22. Some staff members are aware of this contradiction. One told me, "I try not to answer that one legitimately: I have a VCR."
23. In fact, the town was never totally abandoned, nor is it empty now since the five permanent and approximately fifteen seasonal staff members still live there.
24. Staff members must park their vehicles in the parking lot along with visitor cars (or hide them away in one of the town's empty garages) but are allowed to bring vehicles into the townsite for brief periods, in order to load and unload groceries, for example. In the case of my truck, while I have often seen visitors bouncing on the seat, climbing in the bed, or sitting on the hood, I have only once heard one notice, "Hey, look, it's registered!"
25. Campbell's Soup is old—the first red and white cans debuted in 1898—but not old enough to have been present in Bodie during its boom period in the late 1870s and early 1880s. (See Campbell's website, www.campbellsoup.com).
26. Historical information about Bodie can be found in Loose (1979), McGrath (1984); and Wedertz (1969).

27. As Stephen Hanna (1996: 641) has observed, "the creation of . . . images recreates the places being represented." In this sense, the fact that visitors link Bodie to their images of the mythic West literally brings the mythic West into the streets of Bodie.

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