GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS: An International Journal in Contemporary Philosophy and Culture
Volume II, Number 01 (2019): 71-84

Hyperlocal and Global

ELASTIC INTIMACY: THE INCONSPICUOUSNESS OF THE HYPERLOCAL

Nicholas Birns

Abstract

This paper outlines the hyperlocal as a new way of talking about place. Whereas traditional rhetorics of particularity emphasized the uniqueness of a given place and posited it as an object of indissoluble attachment, the hyperlocal seeks to promote an awareness of place that is elastic, intimate, and interstitial. Without resolving into interchangeability or placelessness, the hyperlocal disentangles place from an excessive adhesion to ascribed identity. I explore the relation of the hyperlocal to place not only in geography but in music and art, where adjacency, continuity, and (in the visual arts) inversion provide a way that space can be meaningful but also navigable. In the second half of the paper, I explore the relationship of the hyperlocal to colonization and globalization. The hyperlocal particularly flourished in the age of 'middle modernity', from 1750 to 1850, the age in the Northern Hemisphere of progress, revolution, and democratization, but in the Global South one of European hegemony, expropriation, and genocide. Thus, the hyperlocal emerges as a register in which we can understand the aftermath of globalization without imperial pomp or hyperbole.

I.. Outlining The Hyperlocal

These days, the conceptual contrast between the local and the universal is at a standstill. Both have been somewhat battered from where they were thirty years ago. The local – once embraced by progressive forces as a rebuke to totality, as part of a "small is beautiful" aesthetic, and as part of a resistance to mechanization and technology – now seems associated with revived organic nationalism and claims of racial individuality.[1] The universal, which once portended – in its avatar of a redemptive, saving, global cosmopolitanism – to be our contemporary version of the sublime, now seems vacant, even vacuous, and to be too much of a tool for privileging the advantaged and marginalizing the underprivileged.[2]

1 Greg Sharzer, *No Local?: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won't Change The World* (London: Zero Boks, 2012).
2 Adam Lupel, *Globalization and Popular Sovereignty: Democracy's Transnational Dilemma* (London: Routledge, 2009).

In the wake of the political shocks of 2016, I began to conceptualize the idea of the 'hyperlocal;' to redress the gaps between the universal and the local. Thinkers such as Naoshi Yamawaki spoke of the 'glocal' as a kind of meeting-point between the global and the local, a hybrid solution that would have the best of both worlds.[3] The problem here is that this works only when the forces of global and local are benign; when they are malign (neoliberal corporatism on the one hand, organic nationalism on the other) the glocal appears flaccid. John Kinsella's idea of "International regionalism" is an improvement over the glocal in that it is aware of the rapacious forces of industrial and technological destruction, and sees regionalism not just as staying within one place but as being dispersed and mutually informative.[4] The major difference between international regionalism and the hyperlocal is that international regionalism comes out of Kinsella's deep love for and sense of dwelling in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia, a sense of dwelling he can then transfer, or imagine transferring, in various ways to other regions, either those he has experienced personally or those he can imagine experiencing. I decided to use the word 'hyperlocal'– a concept already widely used in media, graphic design, and to a certain extent in literary criticism.[5] In media, for instance, 'hyperlocal' refers to news targeted to a highly specific area, news which on the other hand is in many respects generic and is not laden with any specific affect or exclusivity regarding the place.[6] The hyperlocal relationship to specificity is empirical and informational, but not laden with as an essentialist effect of locality as traditional rhetorics of place (particularly those emanating from what I would argue is a vulgarized form of Romanticism) would have it.[7] The hyperlocal is occasioned by a sense of dwelling, but does not really draw from it. When I think of hyperlocal places, I think of the places I know. But at least in theory I could have grown up and lived in totally different places and the elasticity and applicability of the hyperlocal would still be there.

The risk, of course, of this sort of interchangeability is that it can become generic and procrustean, more of a cookie-cutter emplacement than an enabling index of variety. The key to preventing the hyperlocal from relapsing into a kind of granular universalism is to emphasize its elasticity. Elasticity – the ability to stretch, to extend, to remain the same while being also different – is the property pursuant to the hyperlocal. It is the elasticity more than any other difference in specific contour that explains the difference between the hyperlocal and the regional or provincial. One can express the difference between the provincial and the hyperlocal by envisioning a shower door with a wheel that is stuck – as the wheel is stuck the shower door remained provincial; once the wheel is free to move, it can become hyperlocal. The wheel remains a wheel, small, suited only to a specific task, not conscious, not really objectively

[3] Nashi Yamawaki, *Glocal Public Philosophy: Towards peaceful and Just Society In The Age of Globalization* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2016).
[4] John Kinsella, *Disclosed Poetics: Beyond Landscape and Lyricism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
[5] Mariano Siskind, *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 87; Ruth Livesey, *Writing The Stage-Coach Nation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 7.
[6] Paul Farhi, "Taking Local Coverage to the Limit: 24 Hour Cable News," *The Washington Post*, March 11, 1991.
[7]Evan Gottlieb and Juliet Shields (eds,), *Representing Place in British Literature and Culture, 1660–1830: From Local to Global* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).

important. But it can move. The contemporary singer Dar Williams, in her book *What I Found In A Thousand Towns*, has talked about how different localities can yet have their locality in common.[8] I would add, though, that this locality-in-common becomes different in its elasticity and adjacency, becomes a mobile hyperlocal rather than an extrapolated or exported local.

Elasticity enables the hyperlocal not just to be about places in the sense of geographical or territorial locales. If we think of place in Germany of the 1700s, we might well think of the *Kleinstaaterei*. These were the small principalities that were Germany's greatest curse in keeping the slowly decaying corpse of the Holy Roman Empire in a sort of suspended animation. But the *Kleinstaaterei* were also, in the view of nationalist thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Germany's greatest blessing in that they kept alive the specificity endemic to the German dream.[9] Yet the hyperlocal would look elsewhere for examples of the eighteenth-century German specificity – to the porcelain-factories of Meissen, where specific, beautiful shapes were made for specific aesthetic and practical uses.[10] In Meissen, soft paste could be shaped into a hard, alluring swan that could sit in the drawing room as an admired object, fixed in that space but also, in a select set of duplicates in other spaces, able to be moved around the house or to other domestic spaces. In the Herder model, space is ethnically torqued and bound to a certain constricting definition of what it is to be a human; in the Meissen model, it is adaptable and defined within a space of relation rather than within an absolute identity.

So the hyperlocal can also pertain to space that is not a place: the aesthetic object, the scientific particle that we know makes up chemical elements or compounds but that it is hard to actually observe, the brushstroke in a painting, the musical note, the plinth or frame of a building. But to have the hyperlocal be everywhere would divest the concept of its pertinence, and I myself am looking at the concept through a certain lens. Though in one sense the hyperlocal is a concept valid in any sort of context, I am particularly interested in its manifestation in what one might call 'middle modernity', 'the period between 1700 and 1850'. I focus on this period because it saw what David Fausett terms "the closing of the global circle," or the exploration of the entire world that saw every inhabited portion of Earth put into contact with each other.[11] Concomitantly, there emerged a kind of liminal space where the state was no longer totally defined from above by (in theory, not actual practice) autocracy, nor (again in theory, not actual practice) totally defined from below by democratic participation. We tend to think of this process of imperialism and the broadening of the participatory base as largely consisting of European expansion, but some of this was otherwise, (for instance the Chinese outreach into Central Asia during the reign of the Chien Lung Emperor).[12]

Even as all parts of the globe were coming, albeit unequally, into social contact, and the large end of the scalar continuum was coming into view, the idea of the smallest possible unit of meaning also gained currency. This can be seen in two very different European philosophical

[8] Dar Williams, *What I Found In A Thousand Towns* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

[9] Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom* (New York: Beacon Press, 1957).

[10] Michael C. Carhart, *The Science Of Culture In Enlightenment* Germany (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[11] David Fausett, *Writing The New World: Imaginary Voyages and utopias of The Great Southern Land* (Syracuse: Syracuse University press, 1993).

[12] Xiuyu Wang, *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands* (Lanham: Lexington, 2011).

traditions, the rationalist one stemming from Descartes and the empiricist one proceeding from John Locke. The rationalist tradition became interested in the particular with the work of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who postulated the monad as the elemental unit of all entities that sought to grow, develop, or become complete.[13] The hyperlocal's relation to Leibnizian monadology and the empirical datum positions the concept along the spectrum of distinctions in the eighteenth-century philosophy, which still govern any philosophical frameworks today. Like the empirical sense-datum, or the scientific particle that can be seen as empirically analogous to the empirical sense-datum, the hyperlocal is discrete, founded, yet without any especial content. Gilles Deleuze's construction of the Leibnizian monad as fold exemplifies the elasticity suggested by the hyperlocal, although the hyperlocal wants to hold on to the idea of the discrete-in-shape more than Deleuze does.[14] There is no difference not only between an English or French sense-datum or particle but also one between one in a mountain or a valley, one apprehended in summer or winter. What becomes important here is that the major difference between the empirical sense-datum and the scientific particle becomes that the particle, even though hypothetical, is seen as objectively being, existing independent of us, but the empirical sense-datum, as in Berkeleyan immaterialism, depends on our experience of it and is processed by the human perceptual sensibility, even if not yet – as in Kantian terms – as constituted by that sensibility.[15] Though I would not be so bold to claim any 'objective' existence to the hyperlocal, the point of the minuteness the concept discloses is not in the impact it makes on our senses but by the way in which it makes external referents at once available but disposable, palpable but inessential, discrete but not unique. In this way, the hyperlocal is more like the Leibnizian monad, except that in Leibniz's scheme the point of the monad is to be a building-block in a designated grand design, whereas the hyperlocal assumes various combinations (through assemblage, combination, and juxtaposition), but does not preordain the resultant framework of its accumulation.

This is all true as long as we see what one can call the positive hyperlocal, the hyperlocal as circulation in the realm of the external. In the aesthetic or cognitive realm what I call the negative hyperlocal comes into play and it is here that Kant, especially the Kant of the Third Critique, becomes relevant. The negative hyperlocal is that which is not, but nonetheless still is in conjecture, in hypothesis; when Keats said "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter," there still is the phenomenological specificity in the unheard melodies (note plural) that the mind conceives, even though it does not hear them – not because they are too subtle but because they are truly not there, but nonetheless they occupy the idea of a particular slice of sensation.[16] That Kant's purposiveness tends towards a purpose, but never achieves one. Kant's purposiveness is on the way there but just never gets there. That sense of being-on-the-way there but never getting there means it is (not) something, occupying a (non-) place. Here

[13] Nicholas Reacher, *G. W. Leibniz's Monadology: An Edition For Students* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[14] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque,* translated by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

[15] Yasuhiko Tomida, *Locke, Berkeley, Kant From A Naturalistic Point of View* (Hildesheim:" Olms Verlag, 2015); J. O. Urmson, *Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[16] John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats,* ed. Horace Scudder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), p. 134..

Marc Augé's theory of non-places comes into play.[17] But whereas a non-place is a place vacant of meaning, negative hyperlocal place – bearing in mind that a hyperlocal place is a place that can have meaning, but not necessarily always or constantly – is an imaginative particular place that is given meaning by its imagined limitations, as in Kant's aesthetic tendency that aims to achieve its purpose but is almost constitutively self-limiting itself in reaching it.

Musical notes can be seen as examples of negative hyperlocal places. Musical notes exist when they are played on specific instruments, but of course on each instrument they will sound differently. Moreover, every performer will sound them differently, much as every artist will paint bluer differently. Thus, although every pictorial rendition of a blue sky or every time a musician pays B flat is an actualization, an instancing of the concept, it is never a concrete, conclusive manifestation of that concept. Likewise, B flat as played is never like "Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan," which is at least a plausible approximation of what the theoretical concept of that may be. Even more importantly, though, a musical note really only exists in the notations on the page the musician plays, or that the musician internalizes and expresses, and thus even heard melodies, much less unheard, have that negative quality of never really subsisting in a given node. Musical space is hyperlocal because a musical composition needs a range of notes, (that is, the possibility of elasticity among multiple nodes of notes), to express itself. Thus both the specificity of each individual note and the transposability of the idea of notation are vital to musical performance. The musicologist Clive McClelland speaks of "strong psychological effect" of "moving the keynote around" which led to an easily achievable effect of "rapid modulation."[18] McClelland notes that this rapid modulation underlay, even if it did not epitomize, the efforts of later, Romantic period composers. These composers wrote in a less liquid and more chromatic way, to render musical instability.

But modulation must modulate something. It must range across a continuum which is necessarily comprised of discrete points. And so a musical template can be seen as a set of rhythms premised on discrete, if unmaterialized, points that can operate hyperlocally, so parochial as to perhaps become an instance of the universal, in the same way as the minute can simply be an instancing. This is much what Harold Bloom meant when he noted that, in the poetry of the era of sensibility (the pre-Romantic era), daemonization preceded kenosis, that a building-up of 'the other' preceded, rather than succeeded, an emptying-out.[19] This sequence of building-up, then emptying-out enabled a reflexivity of particular and universal that, as Michel Foucault pointed out, at once affirmed the given by naming the given outside itself.[20] As a later eighteenth-century poet was to say, we can "see a World in a Grain of Sand/and a Heaven in a Wild Flower/Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/And Eternity in an hour."[21] If we use the idea of the hyperlocal, though, to understand that experience about a range of close and proximate points, both of place and affect, there is a broader continuity, which is not just the connection between opposites but can be about modulation. In modulating between points on a scale, continuity becomes more inclusive.

[17] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, translated by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).
[18] Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Lexington, 2012), p. 32.
[19] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 105.
[20] Michel Foucault *The Order Of Things*, translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 132.
[21] William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence," *The Poems of William Blake* (London: Pickering, 1874), p. 145.

A commonly asked question is, How is the hyperlocal different from the provincial, parochial, or regional? When we speak of the provincial or the parochial, we are usually castigating something for being so minor, so insignificant, that we do not have to look at it, even though its size and scope would normally command our regard. To be told, for instance, that Scottish literature of the Victorian era is only provincial is very much like to be told that, despite the fact that Scotland is clearly a good-sized, reasonably-populated place of objective importance, you should not waste your time on its literature. On the other hand, if one is to say that Scottish literature of the Victorian era is valuable because it represents a Scottish national essence, an endemic 'je ne says quoi' of Scottishness that possesses its own organic zest and vibrancy, is to say that, despite its parochialism, it is important because it expresses a meaning available nowhere else. Because Scotland is defined in both models as a regional space, it is not a hyperlocal space. The regional, whatever its formulation or to whatever extent it approaches the condition of being what Kenneth Frampton called a 'critical regionalism', is capable of becoming a nationalism. Sometimes it falls short of one aspect of the nation, as, in the model that castigates Victorian Scottishness as parochial, there is an admission that Scotland, in size and heft, has every trait it would take to produce a vibrant national literature, except somehow that the talent in this particular time period (no one would dare say the same about the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century) lacked particular distinction. When I was in the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia in 2015, it was carefully explained to me that there was a strong regional—but not at all national—sentiment there. Unlike Catalan, Scottish, or Québec nationalism, where Barcelona, Edinburgh, Quebec City would all be capable of being national capitals, Hohhot was not willing. But this is not the same as saying it is not able. The regional always possesses the potential of being a viable nation, even if that nation would end up being a microstate.

The hyperlocal is what is too small to be viable as a region, and therefore is sufficiently flexible to go beyond regionalism**.** This emerges with respect to the production of colonial space in the Anglophone world between 1750 and 1850, concentrating particularly on Canada and Australia, and how even as these colonies came into view as an agglomeration of regions, an idea of space at once more granular and more mobile than the regional spoke to issues such as spirituality, indigeneity, and performance. A particular focus will be travel narratives that seem to be about visiting one big place, but in terms of their textual production end up being about sundry little places that reverberate globally with a very different force than their regional equivalents, but nonetheless reverberate.

II. The Hyperlocal, Monumental Form, and Colonialism

Settler colonies, in their relation to the colonizer, and modernity, in its relationship with what came before it, share a fundamental temptation. Paul Carter, in *The Road to Botany Bay*, distinguishes between imperial history and spatial history. Imperial history is topographical, universalizing, and Eurocentric; spatial history is experiential, local, and phenomenological.[22] There are two issues here. One relates obviously to indigeneity: a European-derived spatial history, performed by people of European descent claiming other people's lands on their own, may be decolonizing in one way, as in divesting itself of British viewpoints and

[22] Paul Carter, *The Road To Botany Bay* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988).

presuppositions, but is not in another. This is a dilemma wrestled with by the great period of self-conscious settler poetry in Australasia, the 1940's and 1950s. For instance, the New Zealand Allen Curnow's famous poem, "The Skeleton of the Great Moa in Canterbury Museum, Christchurch,"

> Not I, some child, born in a marvelous year,
> Will learn the trick of standing upright here.[23]

There is a semantic ambiguity at the heart of this poem, enacted by the comma after 'Not I'; the most apparent reading is to say that the child born in the marvelous year is from the future, perhaps as a distant descendant, though the genealogical link is not explicit. But the comma means the poet himself could also be the child, and that somebody not him, not that child, will stand upright. Sticking, though, to the more apparent reading, the message of the poem is that the speaker is still too British – as Robert Frost would say, "still England's, still colonial" to really be a New Zealander, and that a future child, born in some sort of more hallowed or favored time, will be at home in New Zealand.[24] But what would the Māori say about that? I do not want to presuppose they would see a Pakeha man at home in New Zealand as not an advance over one who is not, especially considering the existence of the treaty of Waitangi which gives Māori at least some theoretical stake in the New Zealand polity. But I do want to know what they would think, and that open question exposes the fact that the transition from imperial history to spatial history can never really be said to be done. Curnow's poem expresses the most primal and, in the end, the most unrealizable goal of New Zealand nationalism – the yearning for the white settler to feel uncomplicatedly at home there. But it is yet the New Zealand poem in English that has travelled the most and become the most cosmopolitan. The problem with the poem is that it assumes that the process of becoming can be all over, that, to use Curnow's phrase, in some 'marvelous year' they will be completed, they will find their *telos*. And this teleological thrust is monumental; it is annealing and invulnerable. Rather than perceiving a categorical, cathartic act of making-modern, making-sacred, the hyperlocal would look at space that is or can be realized, but is not necessarily.

The space of the scientific particle, a space uninflected by afflatus or numinous, is nonetheless a space that can, in being solicited by an active effort of faith, be envisioned as a Deist plenitude. Here the contemporaneity of European colonization of the Antipodes and the Middle modernity of science and liberalism is notable. Both a radical atheist in Joseph Priestley and a fervent evangelist in John Wesley made transatlantic crossings between England and the United States, signifying that their ideologies were not bound to one particular space or locale, yet that they were, though applicable to the New World, not uniquely invigorated by it. Wesley's statement that 'The world is my parish" can, *mutaits mutandis*, be adapted to the stance of radical atheists like Priestley: such that their spaces are defined in, but not bounded

[23] Allen Curnow, "The Skeleton of The Great Moa In The Canterbury Museum, Christchurch," in *Collected Poems*, edited by Elizabeth Caffin and Terry Sturm (Auckland: Auckland University press, 2018), p. 99.
[24] Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright," *Robert Frost's Poems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1971), p. 255.

to one particular place or identity.[25] Yet, to both, these places and spaces did matter; otherwise Wesley would have said not "the world is my parish" but 'the world is my world."

The hyperlocal-subsidiary distinction is also potentially able to be aligned with that between the temporary and the monumental. The monumental is enduring, imposing unusual monuments, real or symbolic, that are erected, have the endorsement of popular sentiment or at least political authority. But not only can monuments be a symptom of despotism, they can stand for an ossified canon or, as the recent issues with Confederate statues in the US suggest, represent fasces of a society that many now wish to repudiate. In addition, as Noah Guynn argues in his essay on the medieval Anglo-Norman *Roman d'Eneas, the* monumental can be used to marginalize. To honor, in his example, a queer valence that the powers wished to deny is part of its foundational narrative. Additionally, the monumental's preservative capacities can also freeze, anneal, and thus abject. In contrast, the temporary, even if it is necessarily ephemeral and even sometimes trivial, can navigate around the shoals of certainty and not be fixed in a formulated phrase. It is in temporal terms what the hyperlocal is in spatial terms.

In the *Roman d'Eneas,* argues Guynn, a pair of elaborate mausoleums," are erected during the narrative "to commemorate the eradication" of two characters, Pallas and Camille – Camilla in Vergil's original – who rove outside the accepted heteronormative boundaries for their gender.[26] What would seem to be permanent gestures of honor serves just to ballast the initial act of erasure; it is all in the nature of, as Edmund Wilson put it with respect to North American indigenous people, apologies to the Iroquois, not at all disturbing the heteronormative and Eurocentric hegemony that the text presumes. Even though the text Guynn analyzes is just a rewrite of the original Virgilian narrative, it is given a different valence not just by the way the romance genre makes sexuality, and sexual deviation, more explicit, but by the fact that by the year 1100 the two major eventual global colonizers, England and France, had already begun what Guynn calls "state formation," even if their borders and linguistic definitions were very different from those of modernity. We tend to either – following Marx and modernization theory – see the impetus for colonization as beginning after 1500, or see it as not being present in a Europe that in the Marxist tradition was called "feudalist." More recently, Giorgio Agamben has seen ancient Roman law as the key gesture of sovereignty in the European tradition, but Guynn comments that the later twelfth century saw the rise of the nation-state as a 'bounded collective subject."[27] We also have to remember that the Crusades, even if not mounted by nation states, were occurring as a mode of European expansion into Asian and non-Christian territories. Thus the Europe that colonized the Americas and Australasia was already incipient in the era of chivalric romance. Indeed, as the work of Louise darkens has suggested, there is something inherently medievalistic in settler colonialism, which is in that the medieval constitutes precisely the history the white settler colonies feel they lack. Yet the sense of disruption and untimeliness that the medieval occasions in the modern can allegorize both the settler-colonial indecisiveness (Curnow's speaker not quite feeling comfortable where he stands) and the settler-colonial guilt over their usurpation of the lands of the indigenous people.

[25] Noah Guynn, "Eternal Flame State Formation, Deviant Architecture, and the Monumentality of Same-Sex Eroticism in the *Roman d'Eneas* ," *GLQ* (2000) 6 (2): 287-319.
[26] Ibid., pp. 287-319.
[27] Ibid., p. 112.

Calling attention to the medieval or medievalistic within the Eurocentric is in a way decolonization backwards. In Guynn's analysis of the *Roman d'Eneas*, Pallas's tomb, constructed out of "the natural marvel of asphalt bitumen is 'impenetrable' but also porous." In this sense, the monumental when read properly can be seen as unfolding its own inherent temporariness, which at once it seeks to suppress.

It would be easy to evoke "context" as an antidote to the monumental, but I refuse to do so because it has the same issue as modernization, secularization, Carter's spatial history, Curnow situated Pakeha speaker, namely, of suggesting that once we contextualize something, we solve it decisively. Thus I am sympathetic to recent work by Caroline Levine, Sharon Marcus, and Rita Felski, who, coming from very different critical vantage-points, have been skeptical about the suturing and enabling role context played in the historical and political criticism in the 1980s and 1990s.[28] The subsidiarity of context, the way it presupposes a pressing-down ontology to the specific, and the way it is precisely locatable in space and time is its appeal, but is also its limitation. In this way, my ideal reading of the Curnow poem anticipates the "marvelous year" in which whites can feel at home in New Zealand and not some determinate date posterior to its 1943 composition, not 1989 or 2011, not even, say, 2036, but an apocalyptic date never quite to be manifested. Rather than a flagrant or showy apocalyptic, this apocalyptic would be asymptotic, convergent, and adjacent, acknowledging its own provisionality and limitation. Curnow later critiqued the history of this period of buying too much into New Zealand's 'anti-myth', and one of the mistakes that self-styled progressive and decolonizing thought have often made is to substitute an anti-myth for a myth, the modern for the medieval, the secular for the religious, the spatial for the imperial, and just stop there. There might not be a 'there' to stop at or should not be. Robert Frost's line "such as she was, such as she would become," gets a bit closer to the ideal here in swerving away from a cathartic closure.[29] In this light, the hyperlocal, which stresses both the radical specificity and the nearly infinite transferability of place, avoids the decisiveness, the immobility, the monumentality of context. The hyperlocal has its limits, and can even be accused of modesty. It does not, and does not presume to, solve problems like racial and gender hierarchies or the continued legacy of colonialism, although it can call attention to their arbitrariness and potential impermanence.

One can compare the difference between the subsidiary and the hyperlocal, and to the difference in shape and torque between the lake and the pond.[30] The lake is permanent, mappable, an object of beauty. The pond is just ordinary, an object for use or minor adornment, for fishing or for decoration, and is seldom the centerpiece of a designed a landscape or a striking feature of a natural one. Unlike the lake, the pond is seldom prominently featured on maps, and not cross the horizon of someone whose perspective on the world is topographic or cartographic in mode. Cities do not grow up along ponds; rivers seldom flow from them to the sea. Ponds are often collections of rainwater that become situated and periodically replenished;

[28] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction. *Representations*, Vol. 108 No. 1, Fall (2009), pp. 1-21; Caroline Levine*, Forms* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Rita Felski, *The Limits Of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[29] Frost, op. cit., p. 255.

[30] Nicholas Birns, *The Hyperlocal in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Literary Space* (Lanham: Lexington, 2019).

they are fragile and can easily be drained or dried. The pond is often brackish or fetid, and home to unglamorous creatures like frogs. But the pond is a constant and necessary feature of the landscape, vital for sustaining wetlands and ecological life style, for disclosing the intimacy and adjacency of human life, animal life, plant life, and for what rune might be termed the geological or elemental life of dirt, stone, and water. The pond does not have to be valuable in itself, but can lend value for others. Since much clay that is used both in manufacturing and as the material basis for sculpture or porcelain is found in ponds, ponds can have a role in the shaping of objects that were never near a pond. Ponds are thus inconspicuous, fungible, and elastic.

They do not differentiate decisively or melodramatically between the natural and the human, and they mitigate both the destructiveness embodied in the idea of the Anthropocene and the grandiosity associated with the very idea of separating man from nature. If the hyperlocal is not always associated with the domestication of nature, if it can reflect the resilience of nature and the way it possesses such integrity as to not to be fully disclosable or interpretable by the human, the hyperlocal does pertain to nature being nearby, but is not identical with nature, though neither is it non-nature. That is, the hyperlocal is all about the near-at-hand, the adjacent, the metonymic, the proximal, that which is not identical to A, and yet not opposite to A either. It is close to the interstitial or the liminal, but the interstitial or liminal with a bite, a tang, and above all specificity. This is important particularly with respect to indigenous people, who at once lived intimately with nature but also, as Bill Gammage relates in *The Biggest Estate On Earth*, actively shaped, cultivated, and even designed the lands in which they lived. Gammage points out that early English explorers and settlers of Australia compared the new lands they encountered not to the wild parts of Europe, with its uninhabited or sparsely populated forests, but to estates, parks, or prospects.[31] The settlers promulgated the rhetoric of the Australian landscape as a *terra nullius*, an empty land to be seamlessly occupied by white suzerainty. Yet their own eyes, their own sensory impressions, instructed them that the land had already been taken care of, shaped, cultivated acknowledged, in a rhythm where humans and nature acknowledged each other but did not claim or yield prevalence.

The Aboriginal writer Bruce Pascoe, in *Dark Emu*, has spoken further of "the intimate cooperation between people and cetaceans" in terms of neither an antagonistic nor idyllic conception of humans and nature, but one of relationality, adjacency, proximity, modesty.[32] This modesty, modularity, and interpretability are also traits of the hyperlocal. If the hyperlocal is in denotative terms in between the global and the local, if in terms of scale it is beneath even the local, but so maneuverable and elastic as to operate potentially on the scale of the global, on the level of affect the sublime is the opposite of the hyperlocal. Whereas the sublime calls for cataclysmic, catastrophic disruption and privileges the unrepresentable, that which cannot totally be described or explicitly rendered, the hyperlocal focuses on what is within the representable, between its lines, and seeks meaning in that which is so routine as to be usually dismissed as obvious or beneath notice. It is not just a difference in the scrutiny of object or the methodology of access that is pertinent here but is also the tone in which the inquiry is

[31] Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate On Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2013).
[32] Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Agriculture or Accident?* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2018).

conducted. The hyperlocal abjures any insistence or stridency, and focuses on common, available, and comprehensible meanings, meanings that may be sufficiently out of the way as to require particular focus but are never deliberately occult or obscure. This is important in the contemporary global context when so much is made of distance and exoticism, whereas the nearby too can expose attempts at monumentality. Pertinent here is an anecdote I heard once in Australia. A local theater-maker had staged a production of *Oedipus Tyrannos* in a nearby place associated with indigenous people. His portrayal of Oedipus was intended to embody the original sin of European arrogance, and its enactment – a form of post-colonial, cathartic repentance. But the gesture overwhelmed any contrition, becoming self-advertising and grandiose. Oedipus, as a figure, may be self-undoing and may represent a critique of Western attempts at knowledge. His fate might represent guilt and abjection. But he is still a heterosexual, white male calling attention to his own arrogance in a gesture that, in a colonial context, has the potential to repeat that arrogance. Settler-colonial subsidiarity can, against its best and manifest intentions, become like this, perpetuating itself even when seeking some sort of metanoia. This arrogance is just what the hyperlocal can undo.

III. The Travelling Hyperlocal

There is another sort of colonial interaction that can be present even within and under overtly colonial discourse, as seen in this episode from the narrative of the early Australian colonist Watkin Tench,

> Got to Rose Hill in the evening. Next morning walked round the whole of the cleared and cultivated land, with the Rev. Mr. Johnson, who is the best farmer in the country. Edward Dod, one of the governor's household, who conducts everything here in the agricultural line, accompanied us part of the way, and afforded that he estimates the quantity of cleared and cultivated land at 200 acres. Of these 55 are in wheat, barley, and a little oats, 30 in maize, and the remainder is either just cleared of wood, or is occupied by 'buildings, gardens, &c'. Four enclosures of 20 acres each, are planned for the reception of cattle, which may arrive in the colony, and two of these are already fenced in. In the centre of them 'is to be erected a house, for a person who will be fixed upon to' take care of the cattle.[33]

In one sense, one could not get more colonial than this: the land is being cleared, the methods and techniques and livestock of the colonizer are moving in. But, as much as Tench would like the Platonic projection to govern what will happen, there is an element of randomness. The house that will be erected for the person to take care of the cattle will be their house in terms of occupancy, if not of ownership. They will have necessarily, whatever their individual posture, a more intimate and immediate relation to the land at Rose Hill. Moreover, what is being transplanted here is not just European culture, but maize, a crop first cultivated for many millennia by Amerindians before it became part of European global culture. Even as one indigeneity is plowed over, the idea of the non-European cannot be entirely eliminated. This is seen in the journals of the early Canadian settler Susanna Moodie,

[33] Watkin Tench, *1788*, ed. Tim Flannery (Melbourne: Text, 2009), p. 153.

> He had himself served his time as a midshipman on board his father's flag-ship, but had left the navy and accepted a commission in the Buenos-Ayrean service during the political struggles in that province; he had commanded a sort of privateer under the government, to whom, by his own account, he had rendered many very signal services. Why he left South America and came to Canada he kept a profound secret. He had indulged in very vicious and dissipated courses since he came to the province, and by his own account had spent upwards of four thousand pounds, in a manner not over creditable to himself. Finding that his friends would answer his bills no longer, he took possession of a grant of land obtained through his father's interest, up in Harvey, a barren township on the shores of Stony Lake; and, after putting up his shanty, and expending all his remaining means, he found that he did not possess one acre out of the whole four hundred that would yield a crop of potatoes. He was now considerably in debt, and the lands, such as they were, had been seized, with all his effects, by the sheriff, and a warrant was out for his own apprehension, which he contrived to elude during his sojourn with us. Money he had none; and, beyond the dirty fearnought blue seaman's jacket which he wore, a pair of trousers of the coarse cloth of the country, an old black vest that had seen better days, and two blue-checked shirts, clothes he had none. He shaved but once a week, never combed his hair, and never washed himself. A dirtier or more slovenly creature never before was dignified by the title of a gentleman. He was, however, a man of good education, of excellent abilities, and possessed a bitter, sarcastic knowledge of the world; but he was selfish and unprincipled in the highest degree.[34]

The aristocratic wastrel Moodie describes is a world traveler, but for all the wrong reasons. He has gone from England to Argentina to Canada leaving improvidence and incompetence in his trail. And yet this is not just a case of a transcendental lapse in character, of a mind that can find "its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."[35] The experience Moodie described is a Canadian experience, the potatoes he has failed to harvest are Canadian, and her circumstantial encounter with him is a Canadian encounter as well. It is not essentially Canadian, but it still is Canadian; and the tone of mixed evaluation – granting his charm and pathos while chiding him for irresponsibility – is a kind of estimation this shabby gentleman might never have received in his native land.

There have been attempts to discuss travel literature in the nineteenth century as if it was independent of colonization.[36] This might be true of, say, a Dickens visiting France, (although even there Anglocentric cultural attitudes are in evidence); but I refuse to accept that, say, a British man who travels for New Zealand and stays there for a couple of years and does not decisively emigrate is not involved in colonization. Travel is voluntary and victimless, colonization is not just victimless but involuntary, and one of the illusions of talking about travel literature as a separate category is that not only does it exculpate the travelers but also gives them an agency they do not in fact have; whereas everybody on a colonizing voyage or expedition knows that, whatever their supposed individual agenda, they are there as a mobilized instrument of state power. Even Susanna Strickland Moodie, who relates that her husband, the scion of an Orkney islands military family, "landed in Canada" a man not "overgifted with the good things of this world" and that he and his wife aspired to "the emigrant's hope of bettering his condition."[37] Yet from the perspective of the British government, getting rid of precarious

[34] Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it In The Bush: or, Life in Canada* (London: Bentley, 1852), p. 371.
[35] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (New York: S. King, 1831), p. 21.
[36] Tim Youngs, ed. *Travel Writing In The Nineteenth Century* (London: Anthem, 2007).
[37] Susanna Moodie, op. cit., p. 7.

people like the Moodies was weeding out potential dissidents, energetic, industrious subjects who, if dissatisfied in the homeland, could cause trouble, as having enough agency to rebel and enough anxiety to feel dissatisfied. By having the Moodies emigrate, Britain could at once consolidate its grip in Canada and quell any incipient unrest in potentially unruly elements of its own population. This does not ironize or impugn the Moodies' genuine and autonomous aspiration to better themselves; but that their personal betterment was certainly not contrary to a course benefitting the British government means that their emigration is not a way of leaving an empire, and thus there is really no way to decisively arrive as a non-colonizer. Susanna Moodie's bush and clearances become thus not a once-and-for-all site of subsidiary determinacy, but a series of eddying, hyperlocal glimpses of community and loneliness, uncultivatable wildness and uninspirational domesticity.

Colonization is just not libertarian. Nor can it simply postulate the autonomous individual undergirded by what Russell West-Pavlov calls a "basic, underlying synchronicity of the taxonomic system." [38] The traveling hyperlocal, on the other hand, understands that an individual who goes from Britain to New Zealand in the 1800s, whether they think of their journey as migration or travel, is never evading the structures of power. What the travelling hyperlocal can achieve, though, is an encounter with place that at once acknowledges colonization, but does not seek to erect a monumental settler edifice. The travelling hyperlocal is closer to the picaresque than the foundational, the episodic than the monumental; by acknowledging the European traveler is always, as Foucault said of Don Quixote, a "hero of the same," it forestalls the cathartic, foundational colonial primal scene that, weirdly, both imperial history and certain post-colonial gestures have seemed to emphasize. [39] By emphasizing inadvertent and inconspicuous encounters with particularity the hyperlocal discourages the afflatus of subsidiarity. I do not mean to argue against regionalism per se here. In Australia, regions such as Gippsland, New England, and the Wheatbelt play vital roles in resisting a unitary national narrative and settler-colonial complacency, calling attention to the irrepressible diversity of terrain and culture. But these regionalisms are not seeking a quasi-national afflatus. What John Kinsella calls "international regionalism" is a kind of localism that provincializes the global norm as it is asserting a regional difference.

Kinsella's critique of the so called "Antipodean actionist" and of the local activists who can be "disturbingly territorial" argues that the answer to normative arrogance is not the decisively local, but a posture that can shuttle in and out of the local, and from local to local, affirming specificity but never harnessing particularity. [40]. Tench goes from farm to farm, finding anchor but never lodgment, concreteness but never permanence. Much as in Anthony Trollope's later Antipodean travelogue, a numbing series of lists and inventories hollows and vacates any sort of primal or cathartic possessiveness of the land. The passive accretion of the careful indexer militates against the imperial gaze of the conqueror, against even the governmental impulse Tench thinks he is obeying, even if Tench himself certainly never

[38] Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 66.

[39] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 51.

[40] John Kinsella, Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporariness On The Imperatives of Place* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2018), p. 147.

escapes being part of an imperial and colonial mission, is always a minor priest in what Stephen Muecke has called the "magico-religious forces" of the secular state. Watkin Tench can find farm after farm in Rose Hill, but he can never find New South Wales or Australia, even as he is physically there. His overt colonialism and his tacit acknowledgment of his colonialism render an analysis of his project down to the level of the hyperlocal, the sub-topographical.

Even if the hyperlocal and the temporary forsake the visibility and impact – the relevance, one might say, of the subsidiary and monumental – they also renounce the hope, and the danger, of making this decisive, once-and-for-all impact. But they do not demand the eradication of ionization of settler culture. So often, critiques of European imperialism operate by a "first in, last out" rule, whereby the European-derived settler culture of the colonies is castigated as imperialist, while imperial culture itself is left alone. But neither Watkin Tench or Susanna Moodie were fools or people bound to be swindled by history, and though not achieving the impossible goal of a self-sufficient Canadian or Australian identity, they traveled further along the road of self-critique than those who indirectly presided over their journeyings. Another example undermining this rule is a recent historical novel of Australian settlement, Peter Cochrane's *The Making of Martin* Sparrow, where an Australian settler of convict background flees from his own polity. Sparrow has, in Cochrane's words, a "pliability" that enables him to see beyond the alternatives in which his life has been framed.[41] Here a more supple, more indeterminate, but above all still empirical sense of particularity is tactically equipped to assure a plurality of reference and to at least sketch the projection of an interstitial zone between intentionality and impermeability, between projection and renunciation. The hyperlocal is thus seen as supple enough not to deny any meaning even to cultural formations acknowledged as invasive and appropriative.

To sum up: he hyperlocal abjures the genetic, is indifferent to claims of source and origin, and is blasé about teleology. We are far here from the once-and-for-all proclamation of the monumental and the subsidiary. And better off for it. The hyperlocal is experienced in many places. Yet familiar and intimate with them. Helen Rosner remarked that the appeal of Anthony Bourdain's TV travel shows lay in the fact that he had visited the places he talked about frequently.[42] Thus he was able to give the viewer access to these places, highlighting but not exoticizing them. Even though the viewer did not share either Bourdain's lifestyle nor his access to remote places – as the Australian novelist Michelle de Kretser pointed out in her book *Questions Of Travel*, many people who travel, like refugees or migrants, do so involuntarily – they did not feel excluded. I experienced this myself when I saw Bourdain's final show, on the East Village, the New York neighborhood in which I have spent much of my life. I expected to easily rebuke Bourdain as a colonizer and tourist, to mock his presentation of a Disneyfied and othered version of a neighborhood, with which I was familiar in an everyday sense. Instead, I was actually impressed by what he was able – within a short time span, and operating by certain generic conventions of style and medium – to apprehend about the place. The hyperlocal approach does not prevail over a place or exhaust it. It brings the place in all its specificity forward to be encountered by people from other places.

[41] Peter Cochrane, *The Making of Martin Sparrow* (Melbourne: Penguin, 2018).
[42] Helen Rosner, "Anthony Bourdain And The Power of Telling The Truth," *The New Yorker,* June 8, 2018.

The hyperlocal is thus not an ideology. It is not the genesis or source of anything, it is not talking about the beginning of a new era nor is it capable to, save the parent other than in accretion and accumulation. The hyperlocal is like an undercarriage on which more developed benign ideologies can ride. It is the inconspicuous basis for a plausible democracy and a livable internationalism, linked by elastic intimacy.