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The Prairie Condition: The Frontier, Myth and Other Symptoms

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master in Design Studies
Urbanism, Landscape, and Ecology**


At the Harvard University Graduate School of Design

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THE PRAIRIE CONDITION:
THE FRONTIER, MYTH AND OTHER
SYMPTOMS

THE PRAIRIES

“These are the gardens of the Desert, these
 The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful,
 For which the speech of England has no name—
 The Prairies. I behold them for the first,
 And my heart swells, while the dilated sight
 Takes in the encircling vastness. Lo! they stretch,
 In airy undulations, far away,
 As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,
 Stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed,
 And motionless forever. —Motionless?—
 No—they are all unchained again. The clouds
 Sweep over with their shadows, and, beneath,
 The surface rolls and fluctuates to the eye;
 Dark hollows seem to glide along and chase
 The sunny ridges. Breezes of the South!
 Who toss the golden and the flame-like flowers,
 And pass the prairie-hawk that, poised on high,
 Flaps his broad wings, yet moves not—ye have played
 Among the palms of Mexico and vines
 Of Texas, and have crisped the limpid brooks
 That from the fountains of Sonora glide
 Into the calm Pacific—have ye fanned
 A nobler or a lovelier scene than this?
 Man hath no power in all this glorious work:
 The hand that built the firmament hath heaved
 And smoothed these verdant swells, and sown their slopes
 With herbage, planted them with island groves,
 And hedged them round with forests. Fitting floor
 For this magnificent temple of the sky—
 With flowers whose glory and whose multitude
 Rival the constellations! The great heavens
 Seem to stoop down upon the scene in love,—
 A nearer vault, and of a tenderer blue,
 Than that which bends above our eastern hills.

As o’er the verdant waste I guide my steed,
 Among the high rank grass that sweeps his sides
 The hollow beating of his footsteps seems
 A sacrilegious sound. I think of those
 Upon whose rest he tramples. Are they here—
 The dead of other days?—and did the dust
 Of these fair solitudes once stir with life
 And burn with passion? Let the mighty mounds
 That overlook the rivers, or that rise
 In the dim forest crowded with old oaks,
 Answer. A race, that long has passed away,
 Built them;—a disciplined and populous race
 Heaped, with long toil, the earth, while yet the Greek

Was hewing the Pentelicus to forms
 Of symmetry, and rearing on its rock
 The glittering Parthenon. These ample fields
 Nourished their harvest, here their herds were fed,
 When haply by their stalls the bison lowed,
 And bowed his maned shoulder to the yoke.
 All day this desert murmured with their toils,
 Till twilight blushed, and lovers walked, and wooed
 In a forgotten language, and old tunes,
 From instruments of unremembered form,
 Gave the soft winds a voice. The red man came—
 The roaming hunter tribes, warlike and fierce,
 And the mound-builders vanished from the earth.
 The solitude of centuries untold
 Has settled where they dwelt. The prairie-wolf
 Hunts in their meadows, and his fresh-dug den
 Yawns by my path. The gopher mines the ground
 Where stood their swarming cities. All is gone;
 All—save the piles of earth that hold their bones,
 The platforms where they worshipped unknown gods,
 The barriers which they builded from the soil
 To keep the foe at bay—till o'er the walls
 The wild beleaguers broke, and, one by one,
 The strongholds of the plain were forced, and heaped
 With corpses. The brown vultures of the wood
 Flocked to those vast uncovered sepulchres,
 And sat unscared and silent at their feast.
 Haply some solitary fugitive,
 Lurking in marsh and forest, till the sense
 Of desolation and of fear became
 Bitterer than death, yielded himself to die.
 Man's better nature triumphed then. Kind words
 Welcomed and soothed him; the rude conquerors
 Seated the captive with their chiefs; he chose
 A bride among their maidens, and at length
 Seemed to forget—yet ne'er forgot—the wife
 Of his first love, and her sweet little ones,
 Butchered, amid their shrieks, with all his race.

Thus change the forms of being. Thus arise
 Races of living things, glorious in strength,
 And perish, as the quickening breath of God
 Fills them, or is withdrawn. The red man, too,
 Has left the blooming wilds he ranged so long,
 And, nearer to the Rocky Mountains, sought
 A wilder hunting-ground. The beaver builds
 No longer by these streams, but far away,
 On waters whose blue surface ne'er gave back

The white man's face—among Missouri's springs,
 And pools whose issues swell the Oregon—
 He rears his little Venice. In these plains
 The bison feeds no more. Twice twenty leagues
 Beyond remotest smoke of hunter's camp,
 Roams the majestic brute, in herds that shake
 The earth with thundering steps—yet here I meet
 His ancient footprints stamped beside the pool.

Still this great solitude is quick with life.
 Myriads of insects, gaudy as the flowers
 They flutter over, gentle quadrupeds,
 And birds, that scarce have learned the fear of man,
 Are here, and sliding reptiles of the ground,
 Startlingly beautiful. The graceful deer
 Bounds to the wood at my approach. The bee,
 A more adventurous colonist than man,
 With whom he came across the eastern deep,
 Fills the savannas with his murmurings,
 And hides his sweets, as in the golden age,
 Within the hollow oak. I listen long
 To his domestic hum, and think I hear
 The sound of that advancing multitude
 Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground
 Comes up the laugh of children, the soft voice
 Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn
 Of Sabbath worshippers. The low of herds
 Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain
 Over the dark brown furrows. All at once
 A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream,
 And I am in the wilderness alone.”¹

-William Cullen Bryant, 1832

¹ Bryant, "The Prairies."



Albert Newsom, *The Prairie Wolves* (1830-35)

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And now to the particulars, I would like to thank Charles Waldheim and Alex Wall for opening up the complexities and interconnectedness found in and around the urban, the landscape, and the ecological. Your insights and positions were provocative and generative – and which have greatly influenced my thinking on such subjects. Additionally, the importance of finding a personal project has been incredibly fruitful and remains a constant reminder that such intellectual endeavors must make it out back into the urban forms, landscapes, ecologies that we analyze and speculate upon. To Alex, specifically, thank you for letting me tag along in your seminars. Working with you as a teaching assistant has been such a pleasure. To Ed Eigen, thank you for the endless inspiration, advice, mentorship over the last two years. Your seminars have left an eternal mark on my approach to design, history, and literature. Thank you for joining me in this process.

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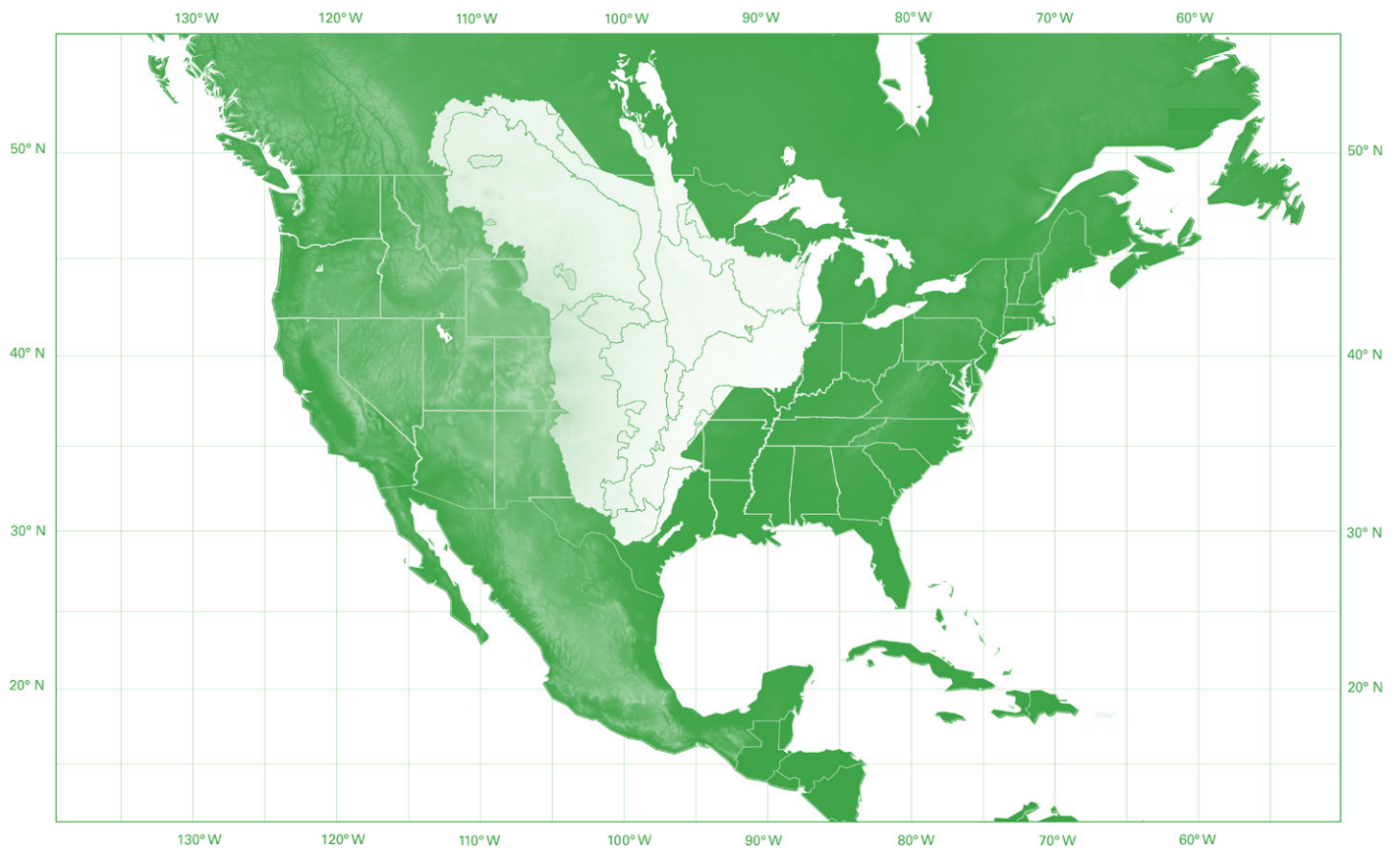
ABSTRACT

THE PRAIRIE CONDITION: THE FRONTIER, MYTH AND OTHER SYMPTOMS

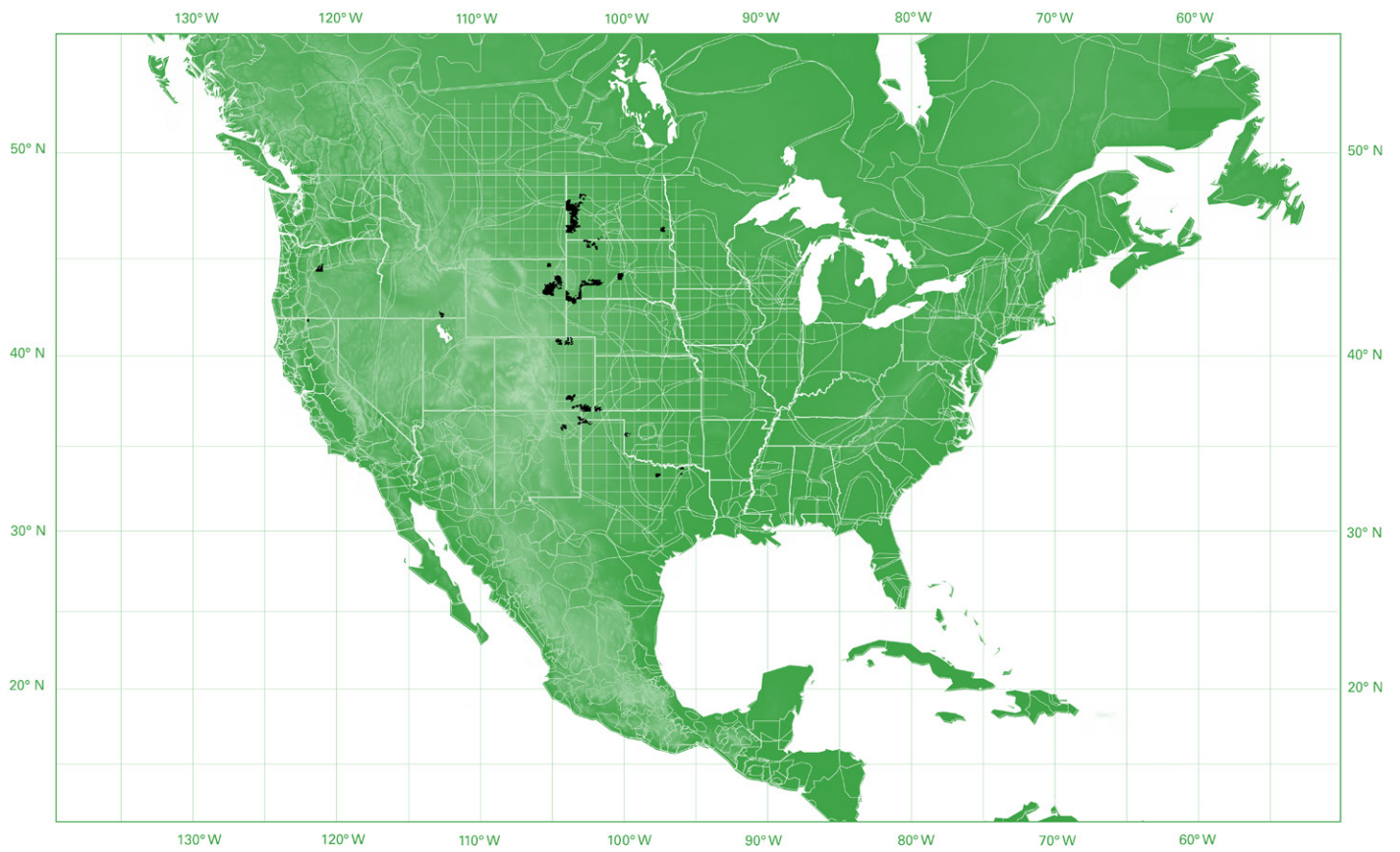
Meaning, aesthetics, and value are imbricated throughout history. The United States' land ethic operates within an episteme of prominence, where the sublime, the biodiverse, the rare are protected. As the climate crisis unfurls and uncertainty continues, we carry assumptions that are not our own, positions that may be inherited. That is, what we protect and what we replicate are connected to what we value.

This thesis traces through history the movement and meaning of specific figures and conditions in and on the American Prairie. As a complicated and contested landscape protagonist, the Prairie remains in aesthetic and conservation limbo. This thesis explores the aesthetic shifts, drifts of taste, and symptoms regarding the Prairie from the nineteenth century to the present. Through the interplay of texts, histories, and subjects, this thesis aims to untangle and expose the mutability of meaning and value of the Prairie.

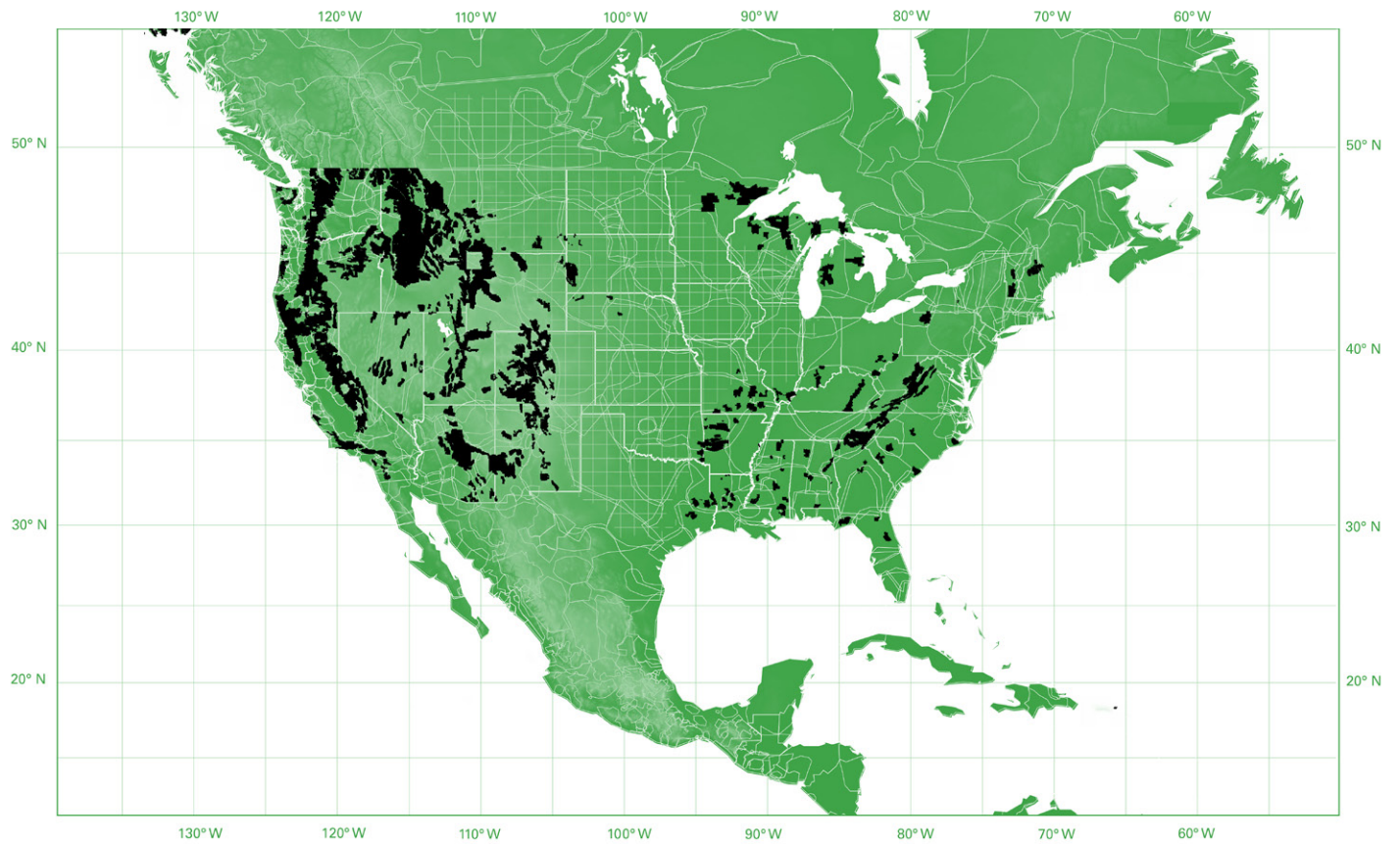
This thesis is not a survey or a broad view of the expanse of the prairie, (although it is broad as the expanse of such a large idea requires) Rather it follows a "Prairie Line" – looking for cached memory, certain figures, expectations, and "what we have been taught to see" to better understand the conservation, reproductions, and agency of the cultural and ecological notion of the "Prairie". This thesis is the beginning of an ongoing collection of text as image and image as text, for further investigations and explorations – it functions as an archive or collection of thought. This thesis is an ever-expanding vista following the curves and bends of the Prairie.



(Fig A. The Prairie as ecological region – green borders mark internal divisions.)



(Fig B. National Grasslands protected by the U.S. Federal Government.)



(Fig C. National Forests protected by the U.S. Federal Government.)

INTRODUCTION

GARDENS OF THE DESERT

“THESE are the gardens of the Desert, these
 The unshorn fields, boundless and beautiful,
 For which the speech of England has no name —
 The Prairies. I behold them for the first,
 And my heart swells, while the dilated sight
 Takes in the encircling vastness. Lo! they stretch,
 In airy undulations, far away,
 As if the ocean, in his gentlest swell,
 Stood still, with an his rounded billows fixed,
 And motionless forever. — Motionless? —
 No — they are all unchained again.”

-William Cullen Bryant¹ (1832)

It would seem to be that the Prairie is an innocuous subject to study. Even the word, Prairie, conjures up benign pollinators, blowsy petals, and a certain midwestern wholesome come dour demeanor. Yet below and above and around such images and (sub)texts, the Prairie reveals and is the site of, the grounds for which other narratives, positions, modes, attitudes have grown or developed. The prairie is a complicated protagonist. It is our savior and a ghost, a barren condition and the apotheosis of a natural ecosystem. It is a hinterland, the ultimate nowhere, yet it is now in the interior of the largest American cities. What is it about the prairie that such conflicting conditions could occur?

Bryant’s poem, “The Prairies”, provides the impetus for this exploration into the topic of the Prairies. The Prairies are indeed “unchained again” as Bryant puts it. There is more to the Prairie than airy undulations. A key narrative behind the prairie is how it is described. be sure, the indigenous peoples who occupy and occupied the prairie had and have intimate and important relations to the region nominally known as the prairie. This thesis does not attempt to condense or

¹ Bryant, “The Prairies.”

essentialize these views of multiple people groups who call the Prairie home. Rather this work investigates the positions and conditions of the prairie by explorers, settlers, writers, interlopers and the like to express the conditions and positions of the prairie through the eye of a settler society. A key concept underlying the importance of these past positions is the notion that what we see in the landscape is not innate or a priori in the way that such interactions with such neutral others may seem. Rather this work relies on the idea that we are taught to see in and out in the landscape what we should see and that these aesthetic positions are mutable.² Now, this mutability of aesthetics and tastes do not discount the incidental encounters with the beautiful, be it a nodding flower or a sweet song of bird. These experiences are topical to larger narratives in any story or account regardless of the time period or place. Rather this thesis looks for certain conditions, moods, milieus to ascertain certain presuppositions based and founded upon (the carried along with) aesthetic positions.

One might be curious to why such aesthetic positions matter in the current moment, (that is the climate crisis) especially for those interested in and about landscape design and or the policy that makes and informs it. To be frank, aesthetics is political, and aesthetic positions influence the who and what we value – and by extension protect, validate, and reproduce. By investigating the underlying situations (opening up that cache) to find these vicissitudes in taste/aesthetics we have the capacity to realize, remember, and by extension contextualize the aesthetics presuppositions that inform and shape the-what-we-value. In other words, noticing the mutability in aesthetic positions opens up the mutability of the what-we-value, the what-we-protect, and the what-we-reproduce. This mutability is an opening for reframing, for remapping, remaking, repositioning, remembering, and reflecting on value and all that hinges and dangles from these ontologies of importance. But why the Prairie? And why now?

² *Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, 1.*



Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, The Prairie Hunter (1852)

To begin we must disaggregate or (at least put to the side) the saccharine associations with the word – Prairie. We must let free to roam and rove all the associations, baggage or merchandise, of the warm and sun-soaked land, open vistas, and pioneer spirit and those autumnal colors, the sublime expanse and the feeling it beckons and most importantly that associated sensation brought forth when one realizes that the packet of wildflower seeds could indeed create habitats for our flying and buzzing nonhuman actants. To be sure, it is easier to use the associated cultural parlay that of which we have gathered along the way; but releasing such trappings that capture us (brambles and briars of culture) to roam the Prairie will allow us to see through these aforementioned autumnal hues and follies.

And while the purpose of this study is to uncover – not all but some – of the social and cultural mythologies and aesthetic positions within the broad and expansive subject/world known as the prairie it is not the end of such thought/work. The exposure of such entangled thoughts opens a slower moment in time to produce and reflect on the conditions of our current age. These exposed positions between different and differing cultural products, poems, travel logs, film, gardens, wilderness, and literature reveal the position as artifact.

Nonetheless, while searching through Prairie cultural artifacts such pathologies, defects, symptoms are at the forefront. To consider the Prairie outside of these conditions of depravity would be a disservice to the topographical topic itself.

“Like men of every age, we see in Nature what we have been taught to look for, we feel what we have been prepared to feel.”³

– Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*

Which is to say that our conceptions of Nature are not natural. We see out in the world what have been taught to see. Nature is a mirror reflecting our own desires, wishes, and conditions.

BENDS AND CURVES + BRAVE AND DEPRAVE

Beginning with the word. Coming from the *pratum*, (reference) “meadow” a word often used interchangeably and if distinguished the latter is associated with a landscape more genuine intimate. European in scale and genteel. Yet, such association as merely as such. *Pratum* comes to us from *pré*, “to bend” or “to curve”. The Prairie opens up to you, assumably as one exits an Eastern forest, and bends and curves, opening up to the sky and “emptiness”. The prairie draws you into its absence. Following the curve of the horizon with the eye signifies vacuity – a nothing-here-ness to the ocular explorer.

Yet, we must dig deeper into such Prairie roots and acknowledge its forbearer *prá*, from which we have *prave* (sp) the etymological source for both “brave” and “depravity”. The Prairie is bold, indeed, alarming in its scale as it bends and folds into other modes too large to comprehend – one must resolve to other more sublime descriptions. Oceans of grass, expansive deserts, the lack of recognizable objects in such fields of vision is bewildering to the interloping explorer and settler. Prairie Madness may ensue. Where the prairie lacks—that depravity – is its lack of trees.

³ *Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, 1.*

The brave requires such adventurous beings, out of that forest into the (adored) wilderness. Between this bend and bravery, the prairie stands against the modern imagination as a wilderness. The Prairie's figure is smooth having few barriers to block the vectors and mechanisms of capital on the surface. A line can be carried across the prairie, roads spaced strategically for parcellation with little friction in space, providing little resistance to capital, And although these positions and lack of resistance made the Prairie amenable for settlers and the imagination to expand upon and over the (indigenous space) land there are other frictions – call them mythologies – that gave rationality and a certain grip to such expansions over the seeming frictionless Prairie. This work is about that bending and such frictions. This work is about exploring and investigating these symptoms, those curves. Following these symptoms, moods, bends and curves through and over tangents on the topic of the Prairie, this work positions the Prairie as the source material for much bending and curves of taste and ideology.

Prairie as locomotive 2-6-2, the Prairie has its on destruction built in to itself from its origin, the machine and the garden are two sides of the same coin. Progress and destruction connected indelibly, indefinitely. The Prairie was and is on the move – it is an engine, a cultural product that moves material in and out of cities. The Prairie as an idea annihilates space and time as a locomotive.

CACHE (MEMORY IN THE GROUND)

"In this emergency they made a cache so distant above on the north side of the river, where they stowed away the most of their merchandise. From thence they proceeded to Taos, where they procured mules and returned to get their hidden property."⁴

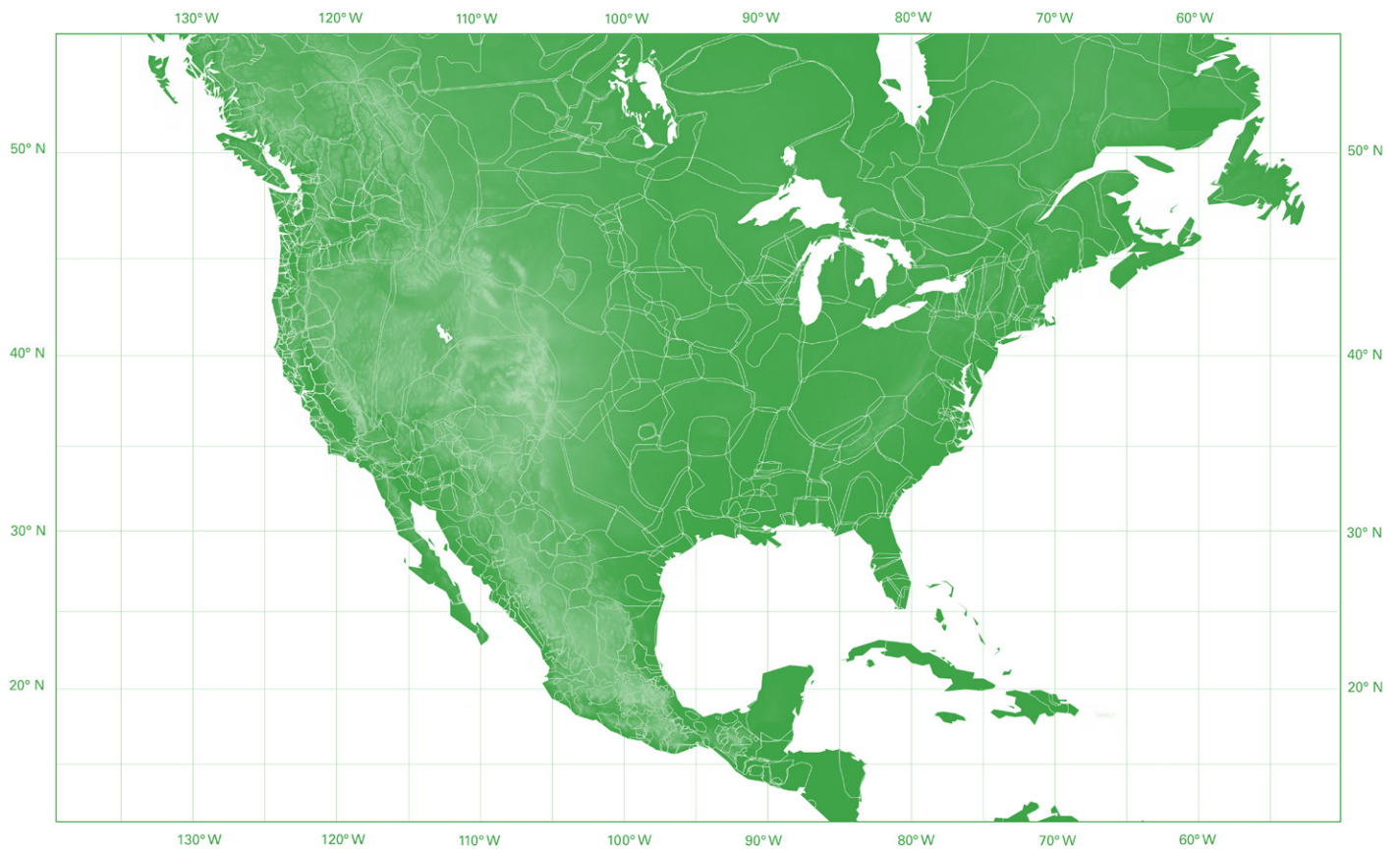
"The term cache, meaning a place of concealment, was originally used by the Canadian French trappers and traders. It is made by digging a hole in the ground somewhat in the shape of a jug, which is lined with dry sticks, grass, or anything else that will protect its contents from the dampness of the earth. In this place the goods to be concealed are carefully closed as to protect them from the rains. In caching a great deal of skill is often required to leave no signs whereby the cunning savage might discover the place of deposit."⁵

⁴ Gregg, *The Commerce of the Prairies*, 56.

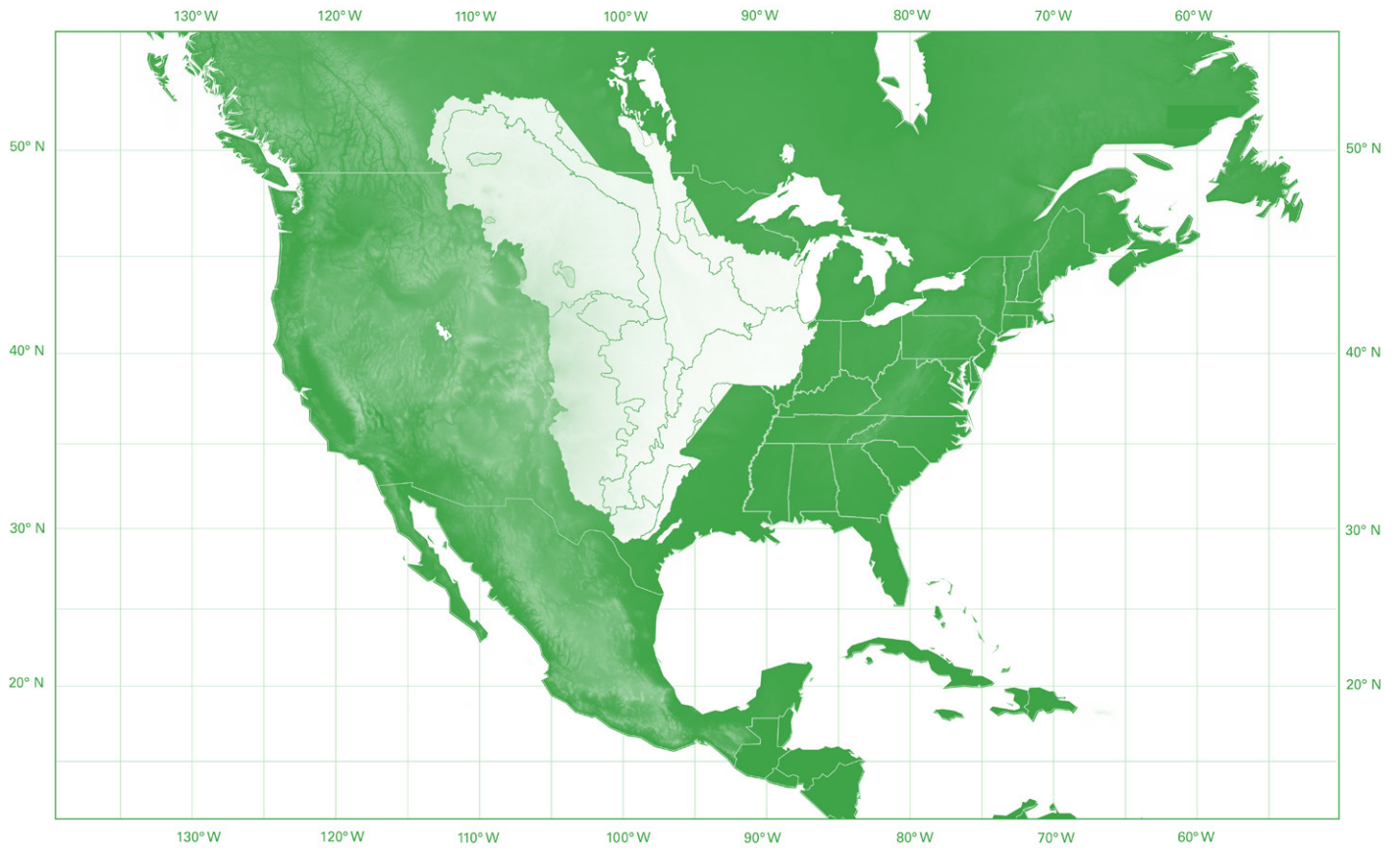
⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

"A plant that occurs early in a vegetational succession. Pioneer species possess characters that suit them to their ecological niches, notably rapid growth, the production of copious small easily dispersed seed, and the ability to germinate and establish themselves on open sites" ¹

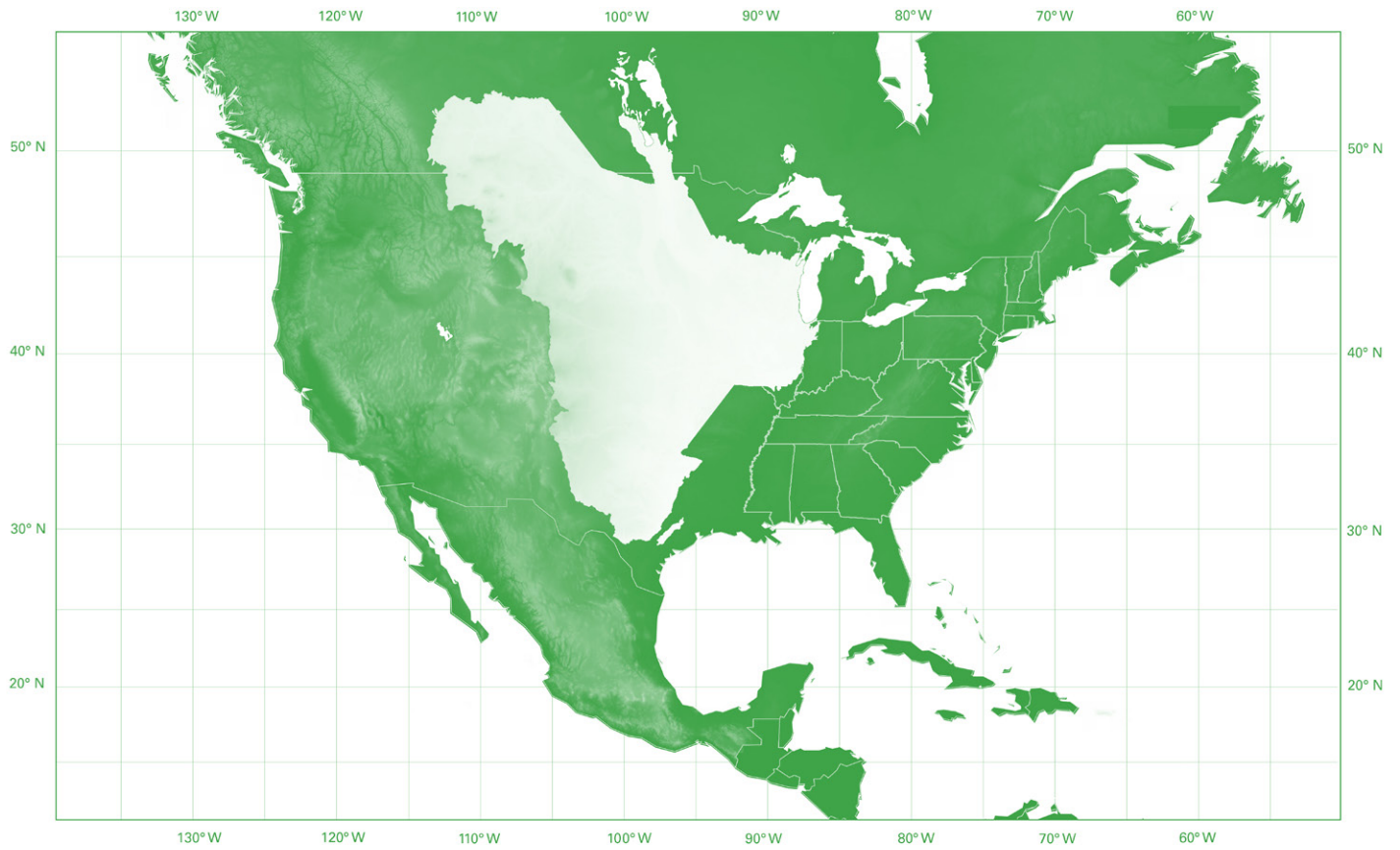
¹ Allaby, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ecology*, 315.



(Fig D. Indigenous and First Nation historical borders – white borders mark boundaries)



(Fig E. The Prairie as ecological region – the Prairie as a frontier.)



(Fig F. The Prairie as a Desert, an empty space, an ocean, a frontier, a void)

"A frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet — not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping; even in its planning, a Frontier is imagined as unplanned."⁶

— Anna Tsing

PRAIRIE AS VOID

Homogenous space in what was the land of multiple sovereign people groups, the Prairie as a physiological classification homogenized and created a region. What was once a heterogenous space to indigenous peoples was transformed into a flat homogenous territory for colonization. Nevertheless, through the ecological categorization the Prairie was laid out as a large inland empty land, a half of the country, an ocean: something to pass over to get to the other side.

If the Prairie is primitive in the eye of the modernist, then the next logical step is development. From the low to the high, the underdeveloped to the developed, the ape to the hominoid, the Prairie from the in the process of directional modernist thinking. And it comes to little surprise that the creators of such biological thought devices such as "Climax Species" would be inhabitants of the prairie. The Prairie was always going somewhere, its emptiness beckoned the imagination to expect trees, forests, and other biological and geographical symbols of civilization.

6 *Tsing, "Natural Resources and Capitalist Frontiers," 1.*



Jerome Thompson, *Prairie Flowers* (1814-1886)

The Prairie was the setting, culturally and physically – a counterpoint to the order and managerialism of colonialism and later metropolitanism. And although we have moved to more complex models of ecology and species change the position of the prairie in cultural parlance (design) presents a differing narrative of “nature’s” place in context to the civilized or primitive positions expressed by more “technological” artifacts.

To get lost in the Prairie and be okay with never finding my way out. It is a matter of being ok with that complexity, existing in the unsure grounds. The Prairie has a double meaning and represents at the same time both a physical space and the space of cultural ideology.

PROGRESS AND CLIMAX

Progress, to a postmodern or a historian, is a problem word. The Prairie was to those early settlers from the east always lacking trees - that foliar home. The Prairie, as they observed was an environment in a perpetual state of flux. And they were right in this acknowledgement, the prairie had been intentionally and recursively burned by the indigenous peoples of the region for millennia. Nonetheless, progress – from the low to the high, that notion of upward transcendence. Mapped on to the Prairie was a lowliness, a position under the forest – a position of lower value.

DESERT WASTE OR UNOCCUPIED LAND

"In the central portion of the great American continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert which, for many a long year, served as a barrier against the advance of civilization. From the Cordillera to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado in the south, is a region of desolation and silence . . . enormous plains which, in winter, are white with snow and, in summer, are gray with the saline alkali dust. They all preserve the common characteristics of barrenness, inhospitality, and misery . . . In this stretch of country there is no sign of life, nor of anything appertaining to life. There is no bird in the steel-blue heaven, no movement upon the dull gray earth-above all, there is absolute silence.

Listen as one may, there is no shadow of a sound in all that mighty wilderness; nothing but silence-complete and heart subduing silence."⁷

-Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The lifelessness of the desert opens up the land for new lives and bodies to enter. The "nothing but silence - complete and heart subduing silence," strikes fear into the heart of the solitary observer in nature, a condition of which demands fixing. In its repulsiveness the Prairie, as Desert, creates the ontological and mythological grounds for an occupation and exploitation (via cultivation).

⁷ Allen, *The Garden-Desert Continuum Competing Views Of The Great Plains In The Nineteenth Century*,

PRAIRIE SUBLIME - PRAIRIE AS OCEAN

To Irving, the prairie is like the ocean. It is expansive. Yet the prairie has a critical attribute that the sea does not. It can be occupied, cultivated, contested, fenced, claimed.

“Thus equipped and provided, an Indian hunter on a prairie is like a cruiser on the ocean, perfectly independent of the world, and competent to self-protection and self-maintenance. He can cast himself loose from every one, shape his own course, and take care of his own fortunes.”⁸

“A thunder-storm on a prairie, as upon the ocean, derives grandeur and sublimity from the wild and boundless waste over which it rages and bellows. It is not surprising that these awful phenomena of nature should be objects of superstitious reverence to the poor savages, and that they should consider the thunder the angry voice of the Great Spirit.”⁹

“A procession of buffaloes, moving slowly up the profile of one of those distant hills, formed a characteristic object in the savage scene. To the left, the eye stretched beyond this rugged wilderness of hills, and ravines, and ragged forests, to a prairie about ten miles off, extending in a clear blue line along the horizon. It was like looking from among rocks and breakers upon a distant tract of tranquil ocean.”¹⁰

“I now found myself in the midst of a lonely waste, in which the prospect was bounded by undulating swells of land, naked and uniform, where, from the deficiency of landmarks and distinct features, an inexperienced man may become bewildered, and lose his way as readily as in the wastes of the ocean.”¹¹

8 *Irving, A Tour on the Prairies, 10.*

9 *Ibid., 39.*

10 *Ibid., 59.*

11 *Ibid., 68.*

““Encounters with Thirst and the Red Man” It having been determined upon, however, to strike across this dreaded desert the following morning, the whole party was busy in preparing for the water scare, as the droughty drives are very appropriately called prairie travelers. This tract of country may truly be styled the grand prairie ocean; for not a single landmark is to be seen for more than forty miles – scarcely a visible eminence by which to direct one’s course. All is as level as the sea, and the compass was our surest, as well as principle guide.”¹² (Gregg, 1844)

The Prairie, as an idea, came upon the scene in the early 1800s. The first condition to mention what is now known as the Prairie were likely French trappers and traders who were capitalizing on the rich access to furs and hides. They did not settle, yet they roved in solitude, participating in such lucrative trade with the indigenous people. Before such times, the Prairie was the home and land to these indigenous people. The Prairie (as we know it) cannot escape commerce. The focus of this work is on the Prairie after the transition as a French territory to the United States. This transition necessitated a cartographic understanding of the new territory for colonization. The Prairie is at once real geographic space, imagined space and ideological space. A space for primitivity and opportunity. A frontier. The Prairie was an opening, an government sponsored opportunity for white settlement onto indigenous lands.

The Prairie offered an adventure, a new beginning, or that most American word - “opportunity” - to the early settlers and explorers of the Prairie. What they saw in that wide open expanse was the antithesis of the congested, complex, and compromised civilized city life. Now, this feeling of the open and “free” land is a not new to the scene at the time of the Prairie nor is it unique to the American experience.¹³

“This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement. Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the

¹² Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies*, 59.

¹³ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 76.

GreatWest. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development. Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. Now the peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people -- to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life."¹⁴

"American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character."¹⁵

"Now, the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails."¹⁶

"Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, anymore than the first phenomenon was a case of

14 *Turner, The Significance of the Frontier in American History, 1.*

15 *Ibid., 2.*

16 *Ibid., 1.*

reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As successive terminal moraines result from successive glaciations, so each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics. Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. And to study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history."¹⁷

"Good soils have been the most continuous attraction to the farmer's frontier. The land hunger of the Virginians drew them down the rivers into Carolina, in early colonial days; the search for soils took the Massachusetts men to Pennsylvania and to New York. The exploitation of the beasts took hunter and trader to the West, the exploitation of the grasses took the rancher west, and the exploitation of the virgin soil of the river valleys and prairies attracted the farmer."¹⁸

"Omitting the pioneer farmer who moves from the love of adventure, the advance of the more steady farmer is easy to understand. Obviously the immigrant was attracted by the cheap lands of the frontier, and even the native farmer felt their influence strongly. Year by year the farmers who lived on soil, whose returns were diminished by unrotated crops were offered the virgin soil of the frontier at nominal prices. Their growing families demanded more lands, and these were dear. The competition of the unexhausted, cheap, and easily tilled prairie lands compelled the farmer either to go west and continue the exhaustion of the soil on a new frontier, or to adopt intensive culture."¹⁹

"Thus the demand for land and the love of wilderness freedom drew the frontier ever onward."²⁰

17 *Turner, The Significance of the Frontier in American History, 2.*

18 *Ibid., 8.*

19 *Ibid., 10.*

20 *Ibid., 10.*



Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, Life on the Prairie (1852)

“Applied to a species that occurs naturally in an area, and therefore one that has not been introduced by humans either accidentally or intentionally. Of plants found in a particular place, the term is applied to those species that occur naturally in (i.e. are indigenous to) the region at the site.”¹

“Applied to a species that was originally imported from another country but now behaves like a “native in that it maintains itself without further intervention and has invaded native communities.”²

¹ Allaby, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ecology*, 276.

² *Ibid*, 277.

“Nostalgia for a passing frontier way of life inevitably implied ambivalence, if not downright hostility, toward modernity and all that it represented. If one saw the wild lands of the frontier as freer, truer, and more natural than other, more modern places, then one was also inclined to see the cities and factories of urban-industrial civilization as confining, false, and artificial.”²¹

William Cronon, *The Trouble with Wilderness* (1996)

21 *Cronon, Uncommon Ground, 77.*

DISAPPEARING NATIVES OR A NOBLE SAVAGE

To a Friend.

“Life is before us a broad and wild prairie;
 While rambling o’er it at youth’s early dawn,
 Crossing Obscure pathways where, often, unwary,
 Those now no more have joyfully gone –
 Let us pause and ask: “For what are seeking?
 On the flowers that come in our way?
 Or, as bold pioneers, to do work, plainly speaking
 For those who come after: ‘ We dwelt here one day?’”
 To work is our purpose; to leave an impression,
 That never the finger of Time can efface;
 To give to our virtues a sun-like expression,
 That never, no never, a spot shall disgrace.
 We would possess that noble ambition—
 The wish to excel in good deeds to mankind;
 And at all times, in humble submission,
 Willingly kneel at the alter of the mind.
 At the shrine never bowing of sensual pleasure,
 Supreme on the throne must the Intellect reign:
 The Intellect! Ah, this beyond measure
 Exalts us above the wild beast of the plain.”²²

Brown’s Poems of the Prairies, (May 16, 1857)

THE PRAIRIE SPIRIT

“Miller’s interest in achieving an American style of gardening pervaded his writings.”²³

Miller’s rational suggests a familiarity with William Robinson’s similar arguments for the British “wild garden...Miller’s essential advocacy of using native plants in a pictorial, nature-like manner was now firmly in place and become the foundation of his effort to establish native American, and later, Prairie School ideals.”²⁴

22 *Brown, Poems of the Prairies, 185.*

23 *Miller, The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening.*

24 *Ibid.*

Miller emphasized “native and hardy” plants over nonnative and fickle “garden plants”²⁵

“therein he postulated that the key to creating an American garden style was the readaptation of English naturalistic planting techniques through the use of largely native plants. Although his conclusions were still wo a degree tenuous, for him the use of native plants had become inextricably linked to the notion of American style.”²⁶

“This movement is founded on the fact that one of the greatest assets which any country or natural part of it can have, is a strong national or regional character, especially in the homes of the common people. Its westernism grows out of the most striking peculiarity of middle-western scenery, which is the prairie, i.e., flat or gently rolling land that was treels when the white man came to Illinois.”²⁷

“Of course, the primary motive was to give recreation and pleasure to the people, but the secondary motive was to inspire them with the vanishing beauty of the prairie. Therefore, I used many symbols of the prairie, i.e., plants with stronly horizontal branches or flowers clusters that repeat in obvious or subtle ways the horizontal line of land and sku which is the most impressive phenomenon on the boundless plains. Also, I aimed to re-create the atmosphere of the prairire by restoring as high a propotion as possible of the trees, shrubs, and flowers native to Illinois.”²⁸

“No matter how humble the individual or how crude the expression, the effort is worth while it is one’s own experience and not another’s. On one square foot of ground a child express his love of country in a map of sand... For example, take the two extreme cases of the people who have no money and those who have no land. The farm laborer goes to the woods, digs up an unknown bush or vine and plants it beside his tenant cottage. To him it may suggest the fatherland from which he

25 *Miller, The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening, 1.*

26 *Ibid., 10.*

27 *Ibid., 10.*

28 *Ibid., 10.*



45. "Away with Gaudy Foreigners and Artificial Varieties!"

"This overgrown nursery in Humboldt Park," says the designer, "was full of brilliant 'best-sellers,' such as cut-leaved, weeping, and variegated shrubs. These may be jewels in themselves, but superb specimens of them can be seen everywhere and forever. Shall we turn the whole outdoor world into a museum?"

Wilhelm Miller, "The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening" (1915)



73. The Prairie Spirit in the Sunny Garden

The first aim in a flower garden or hardy border is flowers and color, but there may also be a deeper, hidden meaning, as explained above.

Wilhelm Miller, "The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening" (1915)



61. "The Straight Way to Bad Taste"

Desecration of an artwork by display of wealth. Can we not have one landscape cemetery with high ideals in every Illinois community? See above.

Wilhelm Miller, "The Prairie Sprit in Landscape Gardening" (1915)



46. "Restore the Native Vegetation!"

"Mr. Corngrower, can you see beauty in your creek, even when there is not a single flower or striking form? If so, you understand why we swept away the showier vegetation of Fig. 45 and restored the simple beauty you often thoughtlessly destroy. If you destroy it, will your children stay on the farm?"

Wilhelm Miller, "The Prairie Sprit in Landscape Gardening" (1915)

has just come, or the child on whose birthday it was planted, or the place he likes to go on Sunday afternoons. It is a crude expression of the manifold charms of Illinois woodland, but to this immigrant it is a step toward naturalization, perhaps even the beginning of wisdom. Moreover, real beauty is there for everyone to see and enjoy. The country folk pause and think: 'Life is not all corn and hogs – to him.'"²⁹

"On the other hand, the city merchant may have plenty of money, but not one foot of earth in front of his store. Let us assume that he is tired of the artificial surroundings and goes to the country for a day's rest and change. And while there, an idea comes to him – he will have something more permanent and natural than window boxes. He will have vines – the kind he used to like as a boy on the farm, the narrow-leaved "woodbine," a variety of Virginia creeper so common in Illinois that porposes of sentiment, we may call it the "Illinois creeper." He has two holes cut into the concrete sidewalks, and plants his souvenirs of Illinois. To him they may recall the parents that are gone, or they may remind him of "the "the day" when he is to shut up shop for good and retire to a country home. The passers-by know nothing of all this, but they are glad to see some sign of country beauty in the city. They say, 'Life is not all dollars to that man.'"³⁰

"Can such a simple plantings be called "restorations" in any important sense? Certainly, if they honestly express the individual's love of the loca scenery, combined with his love of home, an town, and state. Restoration is fundamentally an act of the spirit; the scale of operations is incidental."³¹

29 *Miller, The Prairie Spirit in Landscape Gardening, 10.*

30 *Ibid., 10.*

31 *Ibid., 10.*

THE PRAIRIE AS CURE

“The prairies have in fact become celebrated for the sanative effects – more justly so, no doubt, than the more fashionable water-places of the North. Most chronic diseases, particularly liver complaints, dyspepsia, and similar affections, are often radically cured; owing, no doubt, to the peculiarities of diet and the regular exercise incident to prairie life, as well as to the purity of the atmosphere of those elevated unembarrassed regions. An invalid myself, I can answer for the efficacy of the remedy, at least in my own case.”³² (Gregg, 1844)

INDIVIDUALISM

“Yet I am almost ashamed to confess that scarcely a day passes without my experiencing a pang of regret that I am not now roving at large upon those western plains. Nor do I find my taste peculiar; for I have hardly known a man who has ever become familiar with the kind of life which I have led for so many years, that has not relinquished it with regret. There is more than one way to explain this apparent incongruity. In the first place the wild, unsettled and independent life of the prairie trader makes perfect freedom from nearly every kind of social dependence an absolute necessity of his being. He is in daily, nay hourly exposure of his life and property. And in the habit of relying upon his own arm and his own gun both for protection and support... He knows no government, no laws, save those of his own creation and adoption. He lives in no society which he must look up to or propitiate. The exchange of this untrammelled condition– this sovereign independence, for a life of civilization, where both his physical and moral freedom are invaded at every turn by the complicated machinery of social institutions, is certainly likely to commend itself to but a few –not even to all those who have been educated to find their enjoyments in the arts and elegancies peculiar to civilized society; as is evinced by the frequent instances of men of letters, of refinement and wealth, voluntarily abandoning society for a life upon the prairies or in still the more savage mountain wilds.”³³

32 *Gregg, The Commerce of the Prairies, 22.*

33 *Ibid., 326.*



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)

“There is another consideration, which with most men of the prairies, operates seriously against their reconciliation to the habits of civilized life. Though they be endowed naturally with the organs of taste and refinement, and though once familiar with the ways and practices of civilized communities, yet a long absence from such society... consequently, multitudes rush back to the prairies merely to escape those criticisms and that ridicule which they know not how to disarm.”³⁴

“It will hardly be a matter of surprise then, when I add that this passion for prairie life, how paradoxical soever it may seem, will be very apt to lead me upon the plains again, to spread my bed with the mustang and the buffalo, under the broad canopy of heaven— there to seek to maintain undisturbed my in men by fraternizing with the little prairie dogs and wild colts and the still wilder Indians — the unconquered Sabbeans of the Great American Deserts.”³⁵

“My Country, I love thee, thy prairies and hills;
Thy broad, flowing rivers and murmuring rills;
Thy greatness be sung to the true pet’s lyre,
In strains that such freedom alone can inspire!”³⁶

“A Song of ‘Liberty’”

“May never gaze on thee that thing—
The curse of human-kind — a king;
May never look upon thy wave,
While time shall last, a trembling slave!
Upon thy northern wave the Sioux
Is paddling still his birch canoe.
What lovely prospect meets my view!—
The rolling prairies, like a sea
In vast and wild sublimity,
There lie with an unbroken sod,
Untilled but by the hand of God;
He sows the seeds of grass and flowers;

34 *Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, 326.*

35 *Ibid., 327.*

36 *Brown, Poems of the Prairies, 19.*

He moistens them with vernal showers.
 But look abroad in summer-time;
 I'm sure in England's foggy clime,
 With all the aid that Art affords,
 With all the efforts of rich lords,
 A garden blooming half so fair
 Never yet has flourished there.
 That are her parks, to one who here.
 Has chased the bison, elk, and deer,
 O'er the pathless plains, and through wild woods,
 And wandered in those solitudes,
 Where could be heard no grating sound
 Of mill, nor cattle lowing round,
 Nor crowing cock, nor yelping hound,
 Nor sportman's gun, nor tolling bell,
 The Charms of Nature to dispel..."³⁷

"Any occupied portion of the earth's surface, where the climate is not severe and the soil is not sterile, must always excite more or less interest in those countries of the old world, out of which a stream of emigration is constantly poured. The Prairies of the Western States have, for some years attracted immigrations both from the older States of the American Union and from Europe."³⁸

"There is hardly any thing (sic!) to remind you that the country has not been settled for centuries. There are no stumps of trees, no wounded woods in which the great gash has not left time for the foliage to grow down as a curtain to the side, no zig-zag fences, no log huts; but fine cultivated fields with such a sprinkling of tree as makes the landscape beautiful. Owing to the absence of heavy timber, the country assumes the appearance of an old settlement almost as soon as it is cultivated."³⁹

37 *Brown, Poems of the Prairies, 56.*

38 *Lindsey, The Prairies of the Western States, 5.*

39 *Ibid., 25.*

The prairie lacks little physical resistance to the markings of “civilization” and capital. A swift application of cultivation and the countryside and occupation appears to be as old and as legitimate as its European precedent. Improvements – a picturesque sprinkling of trees.

“The Americans, to do them justice, have an astonishing facility of making cities – especially on paper. I observe for instance, that there is a joint stock city-making company in Minnesota, called the “Docatah Land Company.” No sooner do the Indians surrender a tract of land than this Company sends parties to explore for the sites of future cities, and to take such steps as they can for securing the locations they may pitch upon. This, however, is a ticklish business; for in the United States, even the squatter, who desires to become a bona fide settler, and to improve and finally purchase the lot he has set himself down upon is not assured of any sort of protection whatever, unless he has money.”⁴⁰

“I wonder indeed if the people of this continental inland West know how much of first-class art they have in these prairies – how original and all your own – how much of the influences of a character for your future humanity, broad, patriotic, heroic and new? How entirely they tally on the land the grandeur and superb monotony of the skies of heaven and the ocean with its waters? How freeing, soothing, nourishing they are to the soul? ... This favor’d central area of (in round numbers) two thousand miles square seems fated to be the home of both of what I would call America’s distinctive ideas and distinctives realities.”⁴¹

“My friends, your bills announce me as giving a poem; but I have no poem—have composed none for this occasion. And I can honestly say I am now glad of it. Under these skies resplendent in September beauty—amid the peculiar landscape you are used to, but which is new to me—these interminable and stately prairies—in the freedom and vigor and sane enthusiasm of this perfect western air and autumn

40 *Lindsey, The Prairies of the Western States, 29.*

41 *Whitman, Complete Prose Works.*



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)

sunshine—it seems to me a poem would be almost an impertinence. But if you care to have a word from me, I should speak it about these very prairies; they impress me most, of all the objective shows I see or have seen on this, my first real visit to the West. As I have roll'd rapidly hither for more than a thousand miles, through fair Ohio, through bread-raising Indiana and Illinois—through ample Missouri, that contains and raises everything; as I have partially explor'd your charming city during the last two days, and, standing on Oread hill, by the university, have launch'd my view across broad expanses of living green, in every direction—I have again been most impress'd, I say, and shall remain for the rest of my life most impress'd, with that feature of the topography of your western central world—that vast Something, stretching out on its own unbounded scale, unconfined, which there is in these prairies, combining the real and ideal, and beautiful as dreams."⁴²

“Then is it not subtly they who have given us our leading modern Americans, Lincoln and Grant?—vast-spread, average men—their foregrounds of character altogether practical and real, yet (to those who have eyes to see) with finest backgrounds of the ideal, towering high as any. And do we not see, in them, foreshadowings of the future races that shall fill these prairies?”⁴³

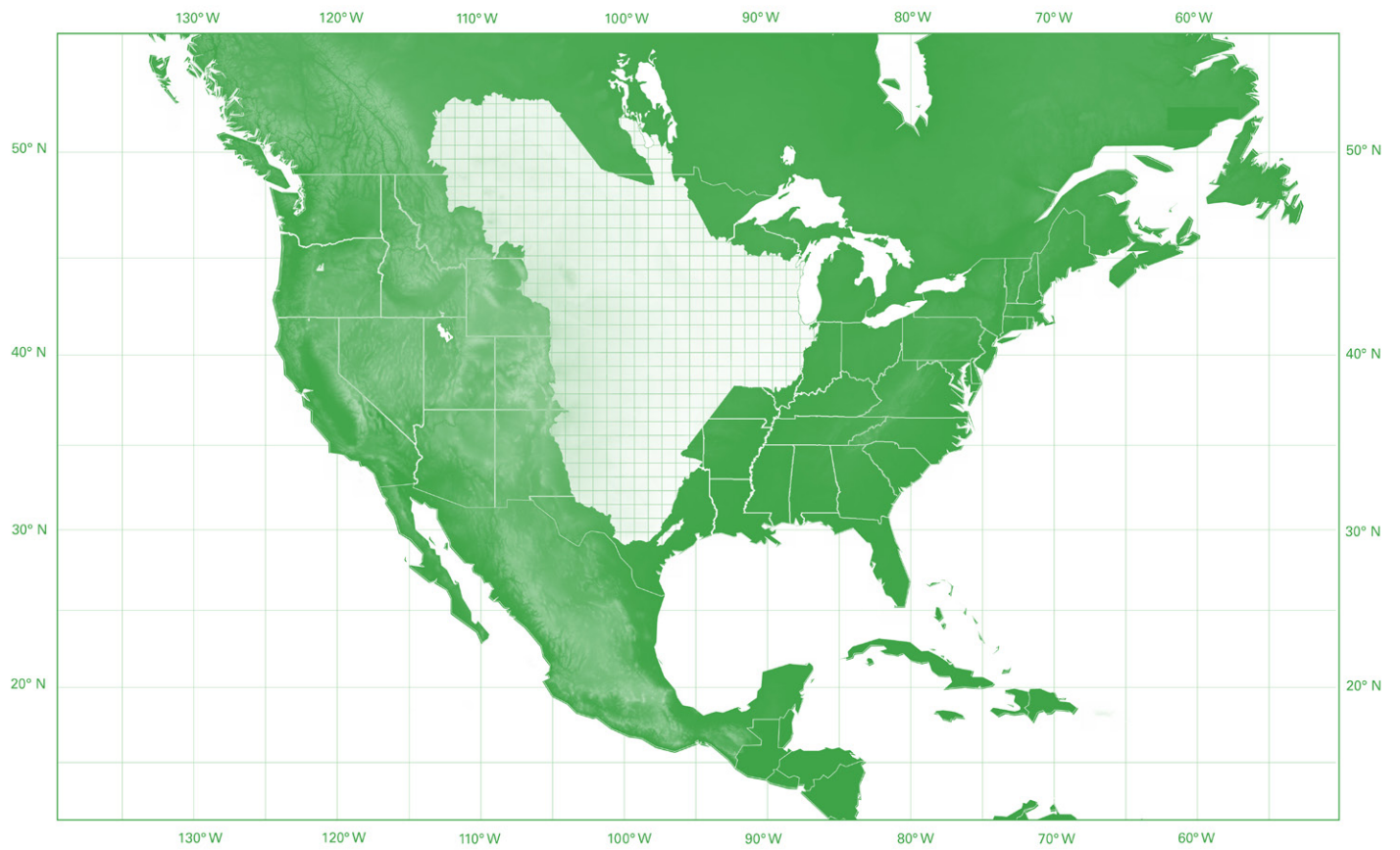
42 *Whitman, Complete Prose Works.*

43 *Ibid.*



"A species that is of a narrow ecological amplitude with respect to one or more environmental factors and which is, when present, therefore indicative of a particular environmental condition or set of conditions."¹

¹ Allaby, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Ecology*, 220.



(Fig G. The Prairie as Cartesian space, a Jeffersonian Democracy, a "closed" frontier)

“The greater the ephemerality, the more pressing the need to discover or manufacture some kind of eternal truth that might lie therein. The religious revival that has become much stronger since the late sixties, and the search for authenticity and authority in politics (with all of its accoutrements of nationalism and localism and of admiration for those charismatic and ‘protean’ individuals... The revival of interest in basic institutions (such as the family and community), and search for historical roots are all signs of a search for more secure moorings and longer lasting values in a shifting world.”⁴⁴

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1996)

⁴⁴ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 292.

Prairies and the suspension of time. Seasonality. Dreamy colors and the imposition of atmosphere through the use of hazy grasses. Yet, it is the erasure of time
 The prairie as wilderness stands against history, distorts and restores time to a clean primordial space.

WILD, AUTHENTIC GARDENS: PRAIRIE AS ARBITER OF TASTE

The Prairie as desert or garden trope is active again. The Prairie is a piece of art worthy to be displayed or it is a region of “desolation and silence” fit for development – capital shapes and reshapes the Prairie – conspicuous flourishing.

THE HIGHLINE

“During September, Friends of the High Line is celebrating the Chelsea Grasslands – a special area of the park between West 18th and West 20th Streets that was inspired by the tallgrass prairie of the American Midwest. Through themed tours, family programming, social media, food, and a panel featuring High Line planting designer Piet Oudolf.”⁴⁵

“My biggest inspiration is nature. I do not want to copy it but to recreate the emotion. What I try to do is build an image of nature.”⁴⁶

–Piet Oudolf (Designing with Plants, Timber Press, 1999)

“CHANGE OCCURS IN A NEAR-INFINITE SUCCESSION OF SMALL MOMENTS, AND LEARNING TO SEE AND UNDERSTAND THESE LITTLE HAPPENINGS IS A WORTHY LIFETIME PURSUIT.”⁴⁷

Rick Darke and Piet Oudolf, Gardens of the High Line: Elevating the Nature of Modern Landscapes

“Inspired by the tallgrass prairie of the Midwest, the Chelsea Grasslands evoke an American landscape that has largely

45 *The Highline, “Celebrating the Chelsea Grasslands.”*

46 *Oudolf and Kingsbury, Designing with Plants.*

47 *Oudolf, Darke, and Hammond, Gardens of the High Line.*

vanished. While many people think of the prairie as a monotonous sea of grass, it was actually quite varied with ecological niches formed by changes in soil moisture, wind exposure, and topography.”⁴⁸

“The tallgrass prairie swarmed with wildlife. It wasn’t uniform, featureless range. There was a variety of habitats: ridgetops with short midgrasses, hillsides and flats with deep grasses, upland groves, heavily timbered floodplains, and the endless sumac and plum woods borders... The prairie then was strewn with small lakes, potholes, and marshes, and veined with tiny creeks.”⁴⁹

“Evoking this varied, open landscape is no small feat on a structure no more than 30 feet wide. How does one interpret the prairie on a small-scale? Piet Oudolf, who designed the High Line’s gardens, selected many plants native to the Midwest. Bur oaks (*Quercus macrophylla*), big bluestem grasses (*Andropogon gerardii*) and compass plants (*Silphium laciniatum*) rise above the burgundy switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum* ‘Shenandoah’). By mixing non-natives like meadow sage (*Salvia pratensis* ‘Pink Delight’), foxtail lily (*Eremurus stenophyllus*), and pincushion plant (*Knautia macedonica*) into the design, Oudolf created variation in color, form and height that reflect the diversity of the prairie.”⁵⁰

“Designed to change over time, the Chelsea Grasslands are constantly in flux. Studying plant ecology and observing how species behave in cultivated conditions enables the gardener to guide changes while remaining true to the original vision. Far from a replication of the wild prairie, this garden connects visitors to that landscape by emphasizing elements of it. Through pattern, color, texture, sound, scent and motion, the Chelsea Grasslands offer visitors a glimpse of a largely lost American wilderness.”⁵¹

“The American prairie has supported human life for thousands of years. Pioneers, initially taken aback by the vastness of

48 *The Highline*, “Celebrating the Chelsea Grasslands.”

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Eck*, “Gardening in the Sky: Celebrating the Chelsea Grasslands.”

51 *Ibid.*

this landscape, tried to pass through it as quickly as possible. However, realizing the agricultural potential of the rich soil, settlers swiftly transformed the Midwest into farm and grazing lands that continue to feed much of the country. Today, farmland has replaced most of the original prairie, leaving only fragments. We hope that the Chelsea Grasslands can serve as a reminder that we need to find a balance between human needs and the natural environment.”⁵²

Low budgets – a pollinator focus. The non-human is at the center of the efforts. The Prairie is a low maintenance dream. From these gardens of The Desert have now entered into a world of miniscule, (read drying up) budgets. The Prairie is a solution and cure for such maladies of finance of public landscape.

PRAIRIE UNCHAINED (AGAIN)

“Past the flannel plains and blacktop graphs and skylines of canted rust, and past the tobacco-brown river overhung with weeping trees and coins of sunlight through them on the water downriver, to the place beyond the windbreak, where untilled fields simmer shrilly in the A.M. heat: shattercane, lamb’s-quarter, cutgrass, sawbrier, nutgrass, jimsonweed, wild mint, dandelion, foxtain, muscadine, spine-cabbage, goldenrod, creeping charlie, butter-print, nightshade, ragweed, wild oat, vetch, butcher grass, invaginate volunteer beans, all heads gently nodding in a morning breeze like a mother’s soft hand on your cheek. An arrow of starlings fired from the windbreak’s thatch. The glitter of dew that stays where it is and steams all day. A sunflower, four more, one bowed, and horses in the distance standing rigid and still as toys. All nodding. Electric sounds of insects at their business. Ale-colored sunshine and pale sky and whorls of cirrus so high they cast no shadow. Insects all business all the time. Quartz and chert and schist and chondrite iron scabs in granite. Very old land. Look around you. The horizon trembling, shapeless. We are all of us brothers.

52 *Eck, “Gardening in the Sky: Celebrating the Chelsea Grasslands.”*

Some crows come overhead then, three or four, not a murder, on the wing, silent with intent, corn-bound for the pasture's wire beyond which one horse smells at the other's behind, the lead horse's tail obligingly lifted. Your shoes' brand incised in the dew. An alfalfa breeze. Socks' burrs. Dry scratching inside a culvert. Rusted wire and tilted posts more a symbol of restraint than a fence per se. NO HUNTING. The shush of the interstate off past the windbreak. The pasture's crows standing at angles, turning up patties to get at the worms underneath, the shapes of the worms incised in the overturned dung and baked by the sun all day until hardened, there to stay, tiny vacant lines in rows and inset curls that do not close because head never quite touches tail. Read these."⁵³

–David Foster Wallace *The Pale King*, 2011

"There is nothing much to see, but perhaps that is why one goes on looking... The gaze turn inward and the Plains, both dry and wet, is a fact that recedes, like everything else, into fiction... In this landscape the tongue is dry but the mind is wet. A scud of. cloud waters the imaginations, fictions springs up. Where there is almost nothing to see, there man sees the most."⁵⁴

–Wright Morris

⁵³ Wallace, *The Pale King*.

⁵⁴ Allen, "The Garden-Desert Continuum Competing Views Of The Great Plains In The Nineteenth Century."

OPPORTUNITY, BOUNDLESSNESS, LEGACY

“American Prairie Reserve represents a unique effort to assemble a multi-million-acre nature reserve that conserves the species-rich grasslands of Montana’s legendary Great Plains for the enjoyment of future generations. When complete, American Prairie Reserve will span more than three million acres of private and public land, showcasing the iconic landscape that once dominated central North America and helped shape our national character.”⁵⁵

– American Prairie Reserve, 2021

“AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY”

“Grasslands are losing. Temperate grasslands are the least protected biome on Earth, with only four places left in the world – including the prairies of Montana – that are viable options for landscape-scale conservation.

A new approach is necessary. Unlike early park-building efforts that relied on the federal government, the Reserve uses a public-private partnership model that stitches together fragmented public lands through the purchase of private lands all thanks to donors from all walks of life.”⁵⁶

If the title “An Unprecedented Opportunity” sounds familiar it may be a trace of earlier Prairie boomer text. The “Opportunity”; the Prairie, brought settlers, capitalist, investors, railroad barons, from the East to the West. ‘Unprecedented Opportunity’ was a myth function of Manifest Destiny. A western expanding societal wish.

55 *American Prairie Reserve, “Why Create the American Prairie Reserve?”*

56 *Ibid.*

“A BOUNDLESS NATURE EXPERIENCE”

“Wildlife needs more room. Biologists determined that a prairie would need to be about 5,000 square miles, roughly 3.2 million acres, in size in order to be a fully functioning ecosystem, complete with migration corridors and all native wildlife.

We need to stretch our legs and minds. Actively spending time in nature is good for our bodies, brains, and emotional well being, and the public should be able to enjoy the land with ease and without fences or “No Trespassing” signs.”⁵⁷

– American Prairie Reserve, 2021

The Prairie is room and freedom. The land is a “fully functioning” machine ecosystem. Time, a currency, can be “spent” in a “nature”. The preserve will be “complete with migration corridors and all native wildlife”. The land, the prairie, like noted in Gregg’s 19th-Century account is ameliorative. Such curative properties of prairie as ‘nature’ are best enjoyed without visible boundaries, fences. Such treks would be inconceivable with such boundaries and monikers of civilization, signs. And while there is much truth to such statements about getting outside and the effects it has on the brain and body, the similarities between such notions of the prairie as an endless open wilderness reflect and mirror earlier accounts of explorers and settlers. In this way, 19th-Century eyes are still looking out into the prairie for a sense of something big and boundless.

57 *American Prairie Reserve, “Why Create the American Prairie Reserve?”*

“AN ENDURING LEGACY”

“Biodiversity builds resiliency. Research has shown that areas with high amounts of native biodiversity, including plants, insects, and animals, are more likely to endure the harsh conditions of climate change.

Our natural heritage shapes who we are. By preserving this iconic landscape, future generations will have lasting access to the wildlife and wonder that helped shape the indomitable American Spirit.”⁵⁸

– American Prairie Reserve, 2021

Now, the prairie has resumed its position as a cure. Although existing and as fragments, a typical condition of post-fordist space production, the prairie is positioned to “Heal the Earth” – save the world. Pocket prairies reintroduce the relationship or previous theme between an individual, on plot of land, the prairie and its non-human inhabitants → non-human actors.

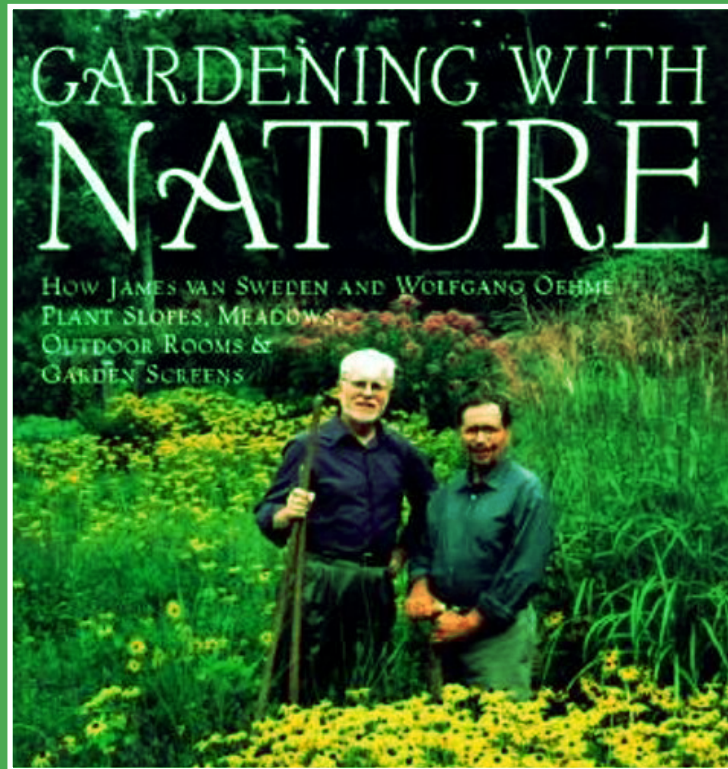
“The American Prairie Reserve (APR) is a massive nature reserve in northeastern Montana being developed as a private project of the American Prairie Foundation. This independent non-profit organization is creating a wildlife conservation area that will ultimately be over 3 million contiguous acres (12,000 km²) through a combination of both private and public lands to establish a fully functioning mixed grass prairie ecosystem, complete with migration corridors and native wildlife.”⁵⁹

58 *American Prairie Reserve, “Why Create the American Prairie Reserve?”*

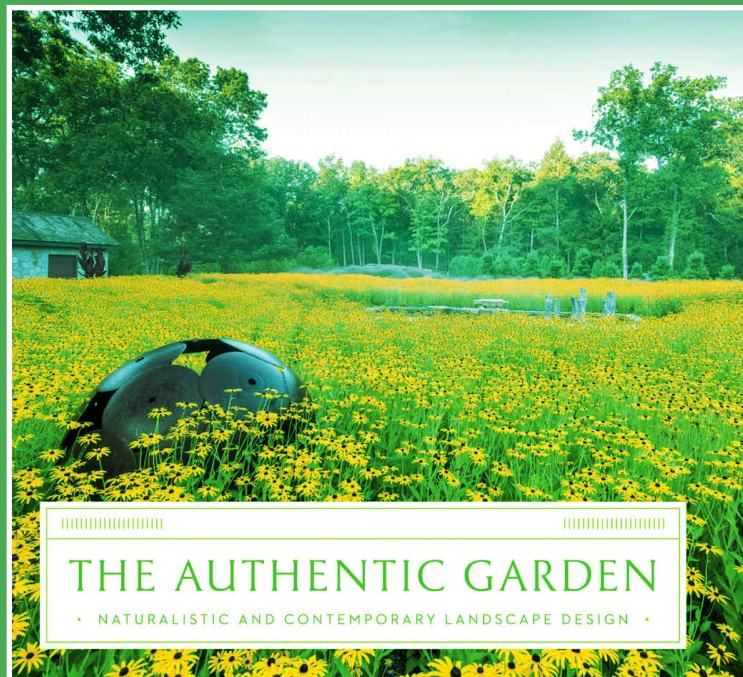
59 *Ibid.*

It would seem that the Prairie all cure and has lost the connotations of the frontier, and all the baggage behind such thought/myth. It has become a fix, a salve, a tactic for the underused disused spaces. The prairie has seemingly bent away from its “discovered” “open” “wilderness” frontier logic. It has shifted, roved, from the position of a “National” landscape to a purely tactical one.

The Prairie is unchained again – it is has drifted from a blight upon the earth, an uncouth boundless wilderness to a fashionable memory object, an ameliorative fix for humans and pollinators alike, and a thing of oneiric beauty, yet it is still haunted by capital, its own Spirit, and by the “American Character.”



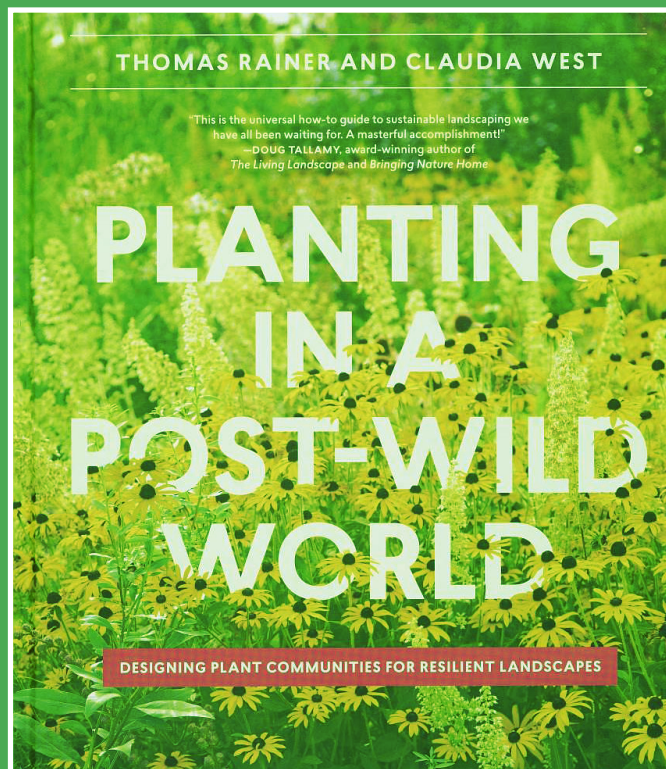
James Van Sweden, Gardening with Nature (1997)



Richard Hartlage and Sandy Fischer, The Authentic Garden: Naturalistic and Contemporary, (2015)



Olympic Garden, "North America, Sarah Price Landscapes, London, UK (2012)



Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, *Planting in a Post-Wild World*, (2018)



Prairie Dress, The New York Times (2018)



Prairie Dress, Los Angeles (2020)



Prairie Dress at a Farmers Market, Los Angeles (2018) The New York Times



Little House on the Prairie, Filmed in California (1974-1983)



Code of The Prairie (1944)



Brown, Leonard. Poems of the Prairies, (1868)



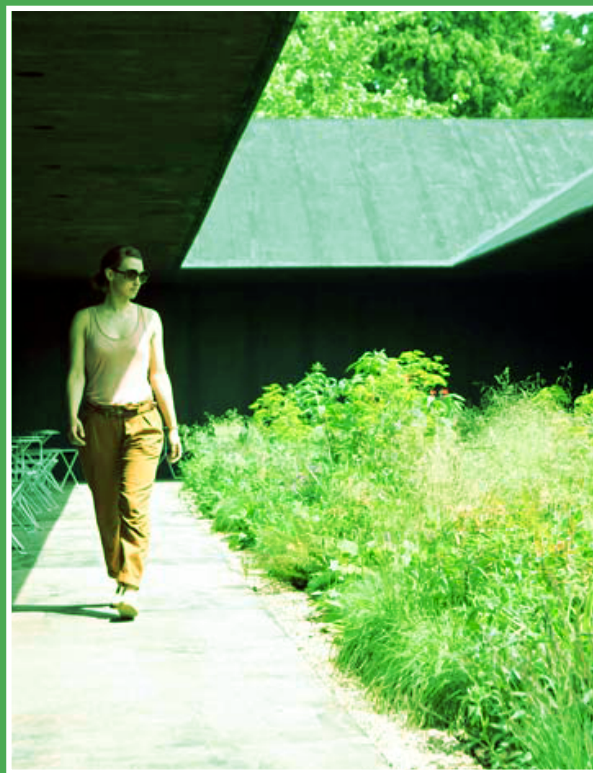
Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, Life on the Prairie (1852)



Prairie Storm King, New York State (2020), The New York Times



Jerome Thompson, "American Beauties" (1814-1886)



Piet Oudolf, Prairie, Serpentine Pavilion, Peter Zumthor, London, UK (2016)



Prairie, Serpentine Pavilion, Smiljan Radic, London, UK (2020)



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)



Piet Oudolf, Prairie, Serpentine Pavilion, Peter Zumthor, London, UK (2016)



Piet Oudolf, The Lurie Garden, Millennium Park , Chicago, USA (2004)



Pocket Prairie, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio, USA (2020)



Rudbeckia fulgida 'Goldsturm', Black-eyed Susan, Perennial Plant of the Year (1999)



My Pocket Prairie, mypocketprairie.com (2021)



**The Chelsea Grasslands
are inspired by the
tallgrass prairies of the
American Midwest.**

The Chelsea Grasslands, The Highline, New York City, USA (2016)



**The Chelsea Grasslands
connect visitors to a
piece of shared history.**

The Chelsea Grasslands, The Highline, New York City, USA (2016)



Arthur Fitzwilliam Tait, The Prairie Hunter (1852)



Albert Newsom, The Prairie Wolves (1839-35)



Pocket Prairie, House Nao. 10. House with Courtyard MOS Architects (2020)



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)



Piet Oudolf in his garden at Hummelo, the Netherlands (2020) Bart Heynen



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)



Prairie Schooner Crossing the Prairie Reenactment, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. (2020)



Pocaket Prairie, House No. 10. House with Courtyard MOS Architects (2020)



Piet Oudolf, The Chelsea Grasslands, The Highline, New York City, USA (2016)



The Grasslands serve as a reminder to find balance between human needs and the natural environment.

Piet Oudolf, The Chelsea Grasslands, The Highline, New York City, USA (2016)



Jerome Thompson, "Prairie Flowers" (1814-1886)



Piet and Anja Oudolf in their garden in the Netherlands (2018)

