



Photograph by Matt Gush.

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESKTOP

Californians have many official symbols: the state flower (poppy), the state fruit (avocado), the state tree (California redwood), the state animal (the erstwhile California grizzly), and others. We do not have a punctuation mark; perhaps we should.

The semicolon represents California as much as anything. It marks something of a conclusion, but not an entire one; a semi-finale to what precedes, while keeping the forgoing near, lingering, remaining; and yet the same continuum yields to new insights, new horizons, new possibilities. Not closed, but open.

Californians are not worried about this lack of closure. We can move forward with the past somewhere back there; we know that where we are is not the end or the beginning—we're in-between, trying to hold onto something of what's gone before, but knowing that what's coming contains more of the point; we sit suspended but aren't bothered by it. We shrug at the lack of finality.

*Boom: A Journal of California* is also experiencing a semicolon moment. With this issue, the sixth volume and print subscription run of *Boom* comes to an end; but the critical, timely, important conversations we've cultivated have just begun. The new *Boom California* will be a free online publication with articles that promise to continue to reframe our vision, adjust our views, and change conversations—conversations that matter not only to California but to the world.

The challenge of sustaining the printed page is real all around. In *Boom's* case, as a University of California Press publication, the journal sounded off with a major grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund a strategic initiative in California Studies. The \$722,000 award supported the creation of this journal and aimed to support this emerging field. The experiment raced quickly through the grant in six

years (perhaps sooner), and the challenge of blending the academic with the public-facing was not always (and is still not) easy to do, trying to blend reflective journalism and beautiful art with serious refereed academic scholarship. We believe California still warrants this, and perhaps now as much as ever.

Over the last six years, we had some fantastic issues: on water innovation and scarcity; on California's role in the Pacific world; on California in the world and the world in California; on the problem with San Francisco; on deep hanging out; on religion in California; on California prisons; and many more. Now we wish to open these conversations to the wider world, making all of our previous content free at <http://boom.ucpress.edu>. Meanwhile, we still wish to write for those who read; we wish to find our readers, California readers. We also wish to find our writers—courageous souls writing this place, mapping it. It may take more courage to write and read California as the rest of the country shifts from the ideas we share as Californians, which may require ongoing mapping, and increased levels of courage.

Along with *Boom*, a number of new and courageous voices have arisen who are writing about California in interesting, effective ways. Doug McGray's award-winning *The California Sunday Magazine* carries captivating stories of California and beyond, and the innovative idea of authors telling stories via telephone recording. Their partner *Pop-Up Magazine* also blazes a new path, with live shows on stage in different venues blending music, readings, visual displays of video art, and sometimes well over-the-top performances. There's Tom Lutz's *LA Review of Books*, which has taken the West Coast world of the literature review by storm. *LARB* really is a worldwide publication, and largely a book review site, accompanied by other creative print media and essays, but nobody has the California beat there. Steve Wasserman just landed back into his hometown Berkeley from his time at Yale University Press in New England, almost as if back from exile. While keeping Heyday's presence in the Bay and LA he brings a kind of strength and chutzpa that fittingly builds on the strong shoulders of Malcolm Margolin, opening conversations in California to the world beyond in ways that fittingly commence the second chapter of California's quintessential publishing house.

Add to this the environmental historian and my predecessor at *Boom*, Jon Christensen, with his timely new Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies (LENS), an incubator for new research and collaboration on storytelling, communications, and media in the service of environmental conservation and equity. With LENS (<https://lensmagazine.org/>) Jon and others advance important interdisciplinary questions of how we tell the stories of this place and will be important to watch. At *Zocalo Public Square* Joe Mathews and Gregory Rodriguez bring the kind of provocative reflection on California (and other cultures) that standard journalism simply doesn't deliver, connecting the past to the present. Kevin Starr is beginning to draw from a deeper, even

religious reading of California, as shown in his next book on the early American conquest, *Continental Ambitions*.

In this issue of *Boom*, we reckon with this place and those creating it. The essays are largely autobiopic, showcasing the lives of ordinary Californians; in many cases, these lives are extraordinary. Inside this issue, some of the best California writers wrestle with loss and memory, finding one's self, and coming of age, and the stories they write help us locate ourselves. We learn the ways of Californians, and of countercultural movements and figures who make their way, critically; seeing and yet not seeing all there is to see; becoming and yet not quite fully becoming, or even fully finding. Yet still, they help us see—their steady pens have delivered many essays helping us to reckon with this place, writing stories we all see ourselves in as their dilemmas become ours, whether we knew before that they should be or not.

After this issue, closing out the volume, *Boom* transitions to a revamped free and exclusively online publication at [www.boomcalifornia.com](http://www.boomcalifornia.com). For further events and conversations, we hope you will also follow us on Twitter (@BoomCalifornia) and Facebook as we turn our focus toward California social issues and seek to cultivate underrepresented writers in the California landscape, amping things up a bit with our peer-review refereed remit.

The new *Boom California* may yet evolve into something in print, with the most significant articles eventually being steered for longevity in the reader's paradise of the physical printed page, which we all love, sitting beautifully on the shelf at home; stay tuned for that. But all of *Boom's* work will immediately be published online, and at a steadier pace than the quarterly print format allows. The majority of our readers appear to be online already, and we look forward to meeting you there.

With the same mission to offer readers a thoughtful and provocative look at the most vital social and cultural issues facing California and the world beyond, we will seek to cultivate the most timely critical conversations happening on or about California, which touch the heart of our identity, and help us to critically address our past, present, and future. Among many things we've learned throughout these six good years of having dinner party conversation pieces served up to us each quarter, we've learned that California simply cannot be what it is without us and our stories. And so we look forward to you joining us in the semicolon, and evolving with us in our ongoing reflection on this wonderful place.

Yours,  
Jason S. Sexton