I take it that the only conceivable reason for asking a writer to talk out loud is to try find out what he's been up to. In-so-far as I know what I've been up to, I'll concentrate here on some of the carpentry of writing—the building of those places in my books that tend to get me invited to symposiums to talk on questions such as, "Are you aware of the sense of place in your books?"

So, yes, I am aware of it—I've spent most of the past 15 years putting it there—and no, I don't fully know its dimensions in my work. Can't know those dimensions precisely, any more than I can know the elevation of every crag in the 80-mile skyline of the Rockies in the part of Montana I've been writing about for the past couple of years.
First, though, to define my terms— that's something they taught me in graduate school across the mountains, to say on occasions such as this— to define my terms, I should nail down what I mean by "region." By "Northwest."
I'd say the Northwest is from the western city limits of Peer, South Dakota--up at least to Nome in Alaska--and down the coast no farther than the first hot tub in Marin County, California. That's enough, tomorrow.

An old Tacoma lumberman once wrote that the capitalists of his era operated on the principle of "While you're gittin', git plenty." I kind of like to define terms that way.
Somewhere in that search for history may lie the seeds of a Western saga similar to the Southern stories of William Faulkner. The West has been too much in a hurry, too new, too full of mistakes, too mobile, to nurture continuing stories. It would be a considerably bigger job to link characters literarily in the West than in the South, Stegner believes, because "the West is so much more varied and it doesn't have that single, abiding black streak of slavery to tie it all together."

"What it does have is a continuous raid against the land and resources. I wouldn't be surprised if whenever such a saga comes around, it has that somewhere in its theme--some American wandering orphan having a bad effect on the land which he loves. That's the theme."
Yes, We have no bandannas

--ch. on "regional" tag
from Tony Angell: the ovoids in Pac NW coastal Indian art are possibly from forms distended under water. (check w/ Bill Holm?)

--link this to importance of the water view in this new house?

--use w/ landform analogies in my writing?
the wash of memory along the coastal banks of the mind
The journeys to Montana unfolded much I had thought was put from me for all time. The plane was like the cashier's tube, about the size of a dice box, which I had seen shooting along the ceiling of some store when I was small. The zzzzing upwards slowed and slowed until the canister just was able to butt to a stop at the cashier; coming down, it built speed—zzzzzzzzZZZZZ—until it whacked to a stop above the saleswoman and rocked there until she twirled her hand and brought it down.

The plane in its landing pattern at Helena would do a turn past the Big Belt mountains which held and concealed so much. From north to south, I could read the backs of the peaks with the Camas ranch below; of Baldy; of Grassy. Farthest south, I could see the Bridgers, where my mother somewhere had died. If for weather or some other reason I flew from Gt. Falls instead of Helena, the flight path curved north toward the mountains behind Dupuyer.
in the time when tapwater was a dream
emotion beat its wings in the air

You must let...
Let...
Once upon a time, an emeritus professor from Yale—wait, it gets racier—

to only then thought to try to invoke: But do—'t be me

Well, gambler's rules have always been a little shaky—trials are 7 things. What about—but... into how sharpened up

-CBJ / Reagan poodle yelped
- Dances w/ dying... for. wolf's sake
- White: You never got to 2 @ a topic: some ago, after WH gave it a going over: goes even and w/ his年终 pile artillery...
- eh. on cal? 
Chè, close, goddess, do—'t let it be post-anthem part
"LynxTon, I fed my 001 Bush..."

Gogol's o'cool, on Nema... 101 yrs... FJ Turner's high column.
Simon Schama in Dead Certainties, abt. Francis Parkman's cohorts in Mass. Historical Society in 1890's Boston:

"...history if not wholly on their side was at least firmly in their custody."
James Joyce/Ulysses—one of the greatest books of place, written in Paris.

"Have I ever left?"
- put on message
- write c. pointed end

Lead: I'm here today as... 

Yours did: 'write "center" & gathering frame before WRIT
- in age, he wrote...
- We are not surprised; center cannot hold; it's always been beat
- lost a so-so ranch hand
material from Western Australia about regionalism and concepts of the West is in History/Frontier filefolder in bottom drawer of green file cabinet. The material:

---Bruce Bennett's U. of Western Australia syllabus for "Contexts of Regionalism in Australian and Canadian Fiction"

---Bennett's July '84 article in WESTERLY, "Concepts of 'the West' in Canadian and Australian Literary Studies"

---"Regions and Regionalism" chapter, overview of many Australian writers as of 1988, from The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-88, by Ken Gelder & Paul Salzman

other material about literature of the Australian West is in books shelved w/ our Australian novels: Bennett's An Australian Compass: Essays on Place and Direction in Australian Literature Impressions: West Coast Fiction 1829-1988, ed. Peter Cowan
St. Louis boys: Charlie Russell and T.S. Eliot

——Syd Kaplan noticed, at MHS Russell Gallery during our June '92 MT trip, that CMR left St. Louis for the West must as TSE did for the East (London). She figured their families may well have known each other, given the similar social stratum.

——possible imagining, then: reverse the two, CMR to London and art there, and TSE's austere poetic view in Montana.
Montana is a roadkill on the path of change?

--It's (the country, the society) going over us like we were roadkills.
I try to think myself back into that other boyhood, to feel from the skin inward what it would have been like to grow up within the far mountain basin, in a large fatherless family, with...

...with winter holding the country five months of a year and bankers in wait for it most of the rest of the time. My growing up had its own odd skews, but my father's boyhood crooked off along angles almost beyond my imagining.
nostalgia: a longing for things, persons or situations that are not present
from Rich Roeder:

He uses in his Mont. history course a 1957 quote from HG Merriam, that at that moment (Westerns and children’s authors aside) there were no working writers in Montana.

-Mildred Walker out of state?
"The authentic Western voice...is one heard often in life but only rarely in literature, the reason being that to truly know the West is to lack all will to write it down. The very subject of 'The Executioner's Song' is that vast emptiness at the center of the Western experience...a dread so close to zero that human voices fade out, trail off, like skywriting."
You get the impression that somewhere just out of sight, there must be a catering service, maybe someplace around Omaha, that comes out and feeds everybody, and does the chores.

Nonsensical as that sort of portrait of the west is, it does have consequences: it fudges the terms of life in much of the actual west—that this is a big, dry, fragile, contentious part of the country which requires a lot of work to make a living.

The Virginian's remarkable way with words reminds me that the language of the west is another fuel for the writer.
on regionalism: Maclean's quote in Spokane paper (in Penguin file) says making themes universal enough to prick human heart.
Stegner, LA Times, July 29 '79:

"When a really good country begins to get intolerable, the nostalgia for what it used to be is going to chase people back into an examination of how it got to be what it is."
8 March '86: Cort Conley of U. of Idaho Press, in asking me to write blurb for HL Davis anthology, mentioned my town of Gros Ventre, assuming I'd picked that name in emulation of Davis' use of it as pseudonym for The Dalles in "A Town in Eastern Oregon." He what, I asked. Told Cort no, I hadn't at all known that (I suppose Davis did it for the "Big Belly" slam implicit in the name), and that I'd chosen it instead as a bit of tribute to Jim Welch, and also for its Montanan oddness and illogicality.
LBJ--few hundred acres...
Well, that was bad enough.

And now we have a President who, if you put together the White House descriptions of his California vacations, claims his idea of a good time is to put on a pair of old Jodpurks and cut brush around the ranch.

For guys like Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan to call themselves ranchers is like hanging around an airport and thinking you can call yourself a pilot.

I think so, one of the first things a writer about the West has to do is to shovel away the misconceptions.
David Remley, Albuquerque Journal, June 25, '85: "(English Creek) is about accommodating to the past and to others. Here is a novel of Western life that, like so few others, goes beyond the boundaries of the West."
In answer to qns of why I don't move back to Montana, cite James Joyce's reply when asked if he'd ever return to Dublin: "Have I ever left it?"
Are Westerners an island people? (Islanded by distance, bigness of nature?)
Kittredge printout Louis L'Amour obit, Traveler in White Space file, top drawer
George Stewart, Sheep Rock, p. 33--

Every place is only part of long continuous space.
...what happens to a place when it begins to have more dead than living.
Books set in the West haven't always given attention to the workaday life. But about this time last year that it was cut here. I noticed in the paper the other day that this spring is the 80th anniversary of the publication of The Virginian, Owen Wister's famous novel. That book provided millions of people, all around the world, with a version of the American West. That version is that when a bad guy insults a good guy—in the book, the actual insult is "you son of a blank"—the good guy dangerously drawls back, "When you call me that—smile." That sort of thing is about all that does go on in The Virginian—or for that matter, in a lot of the shoot-em-up versions of the west. None of the guys, good or bad, seems ever to do a lick of everyday work—milk a cow, churn butter, plant a potato.
You get the impression that somewhere just out of sight, there must be a catering service, maybe someplace around Omaha, that comes out and feeds everybody, and does the chores.

Nonsensical as that sort of portrait of the west is, it does have consequences: it fudges the terms of life in much of the actual American west—that, east of the Cascades, this is a big, dry, fragile, contentious part of the country which requires a lot of work to make a living—and that, even here on the west side of Mount Hood and Mount Rainier, the ecosystem is challengingly complex—as a forestry scientist once pointed out to me, between the crest of the Cascades and the Pacific shoreline there can be as much variation in climate as in the stretch between the Gulf of Mexico and mid-Ontario.

The Virginian's remarkable way with words reminds me that the language of the west is another fuel for the writer.
writing about the west of America

My impression is that today's Western writing frequently is thought of by critics and reviewers as a focus on the land, rather than on people. Often the book titles themselves have seemed to say so: The Big Sky... Wolf Willow... Winds of Morning... A River Runs Through It. The notion, I suppose, is that the immensities of the West, its extremes of landform and its powerful weather and the distances which flabbergast travelers from elsewhere in this country;--these immensities overwhelm the fact of the people thinly salt-and-peppered across the expanse.

(Every so often, some Eastern reviewer of This House of Sky would refer to me as having been born and brought up in the Montana wilderness. Now, we can all grant that some unshorn behavior occur in Montana now and again, but it's not that...
Montana's seasons declared themselves loud and clear. They regulated life. (In our family, we did not like to be regulated by much else.) At least once a generation, a giant winter would send the livestock industry to its knees. Farming wobbled with every dry summer.

(used in *Heart Earth?*)
that world of ranchcraft

(Back to that " when we returned from AZ: used in Heart Earth?)
Here lies William Smith; and what is somewhat rarish,
He was born, bred, and hanged in this here parish.

(Br. FlkIrsts, 42)
My interests as a writer have focused back and forth on the two chunks of the Northwest I happen to know anything about—Montana along the rim of the Rockies where I grew up, and the Puget Sound and coast country where I live now. They're of course very different territories, but linked in some ways. Norman Maclean noted one in his fine story, A River Runs Through It. Maclean claims: "Practically everybody on the West Coast was born in the Rocky Mountains—where they failed as fly fishermen, so they migrated to the West Coast and became lawyers, certified public accountants, presidents of airplane companies, gamblers or Mormon missionaries." As far as I can tell (I think I fit into Maclean's gallery of expatriates only as a failed fly fisherman— but in that category, I definitely qualify.)
That characterization—at least the failed fly fisherman part of it—in fact appeals to me more and more. Over the past dozen years or so, whenever I've been introduced to someone, and they say, "What do you do?" and I say back, "I'm a writer," they then say, as if by catechism, "Oh, I've always wanted to write a book how do I get an agent?" For me to announce in the middle of all that, "I'm a failed fly fisherman," I think would upgrade that whole ritual conversation a lot.