TITLE: A Post-Bacc Staple Thesis

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Acknowldegements

This collection would not have been possible without the support (and enabling) from many excellent humans in my life. Thanks to Scott for his patience with my neuroses, Leo for opening my eyes to what we can see, Donald for his interest in my stories, Jamie for supervising my performance, and Ian for endless enthusiasm for long nights at the bar.

Contents

Preface

I think of my post-bacc phase as this: one day, several years after I finished my bachelor's in creative writing, I realized I missed writing papers, and regretted not engaging with paper-writing in a more meaningful way during my undergraduate years. I graduated from the English department! How did I fail to feel satisfied with my paper-writing? (the answer probably remains obscured by the stale beer-sweat of my post-adolescent angst) Fortunately, for the sake of my unfulfilled desires, it was trivial to register as a non-degree student at my alma mater.

It always seemed a little unfair to the other undergraduates when I was doing my post-bacc coursework. Not only had I already completed a bachelor's degree, but I did it at the same university as they were attending. I had little at stake, with far less work on my platel I was hitting far below my weight class, and I knew it, and sometimes they knew it. I mean, I've always been a shameless over-achiever and an incorrigible teacher's pet.

So, maybe it's time to move on. I'm writing this now as part of my transition into my pre-doc phase: the period of time during which I have not yet applied to a graduate program, but I'll be taking graduate-level courses and producing more serious work.

As a pre-doc, the main difference is that my classmates will have achieved things I haven't yet reached: they've taken their GREs, they've applied to a graduate program, and, more to the point, are actual doctoral candidates. Me? I'm still just a non-degree staffer filling up my free time with busywork. What's that going to feel like? I guess I'll find out! Also, now I'll have to pay tax on my tuition benefits (boooo).

This is an archive of my rampage through Carnegie Mellon University's history department from 2012–2016, courtsey of my staff tuition benefits. These are presented in chronological order, with one chapter per course. I've made a few minor typological and typographical edits for the sake of consistency, but other than that, these essays remain the same as what I turned in to my professors.

—January 9, 2017; Pittsburgh, PA

Chapter 1

American Political Humor

Authority, hegemony, and why nothing is funny.

—Fall 2012

I. The Greyness of Mark Twain

18 September 2012

It is a tempting and simple instinct of humans to divide the world into a series of dichotomies; truth and lies, civilized and savage, sin and morality, black and white. However, it is the spectrum between, the infinite divisibility of the grey area, that provides truly worthwhile things for study. The extremes only exist as notions, ideals that can never be realized, for one requires the context of one side in order to note the existence of the other. Acknowledgment of both reveals a vast and muddled space between, in which travel becomes possible. Throughout his life, Mark Twain embarked on his own journey through this inexplicable grey area, and his discoveries formed the basis of his humor.

In *The Importance of Mark Twain*, Alan Gribben defines Twain as the quintessential American humorist, noting that he exists as a "crucial continuity" and a "common denominator of what we want to perceive to be the American character"[1]. Indeed, Twain's status in history stands as an almost mythological figure, a strange life bookended by two appearances of an astrological phenomenon. Charles Neider describes him as a living incongruity, both a clown and a tragedian, both an amateur and a competent professional, both an optimist and a pessimist[2]. Twain's inexplicable connection to both the blacks and the whites of the world, an intimate understanding of the existence of dichotomies, allowed him to display the gradient of greys as he dilutes whiteness with black and vice versa.

Twain begins his foray into mass publication with an open editorial to *The Buffalo Express*, in which he declares from the start that he shall be existing in the grey field. In "Salutatory", he provides the paper's readership with a

list of absolutes, such as confining himself to truth, rebuking all forms of crime, refraining from vulgar speech, etc. except when he won't[3]. This is his initial declaration to the literate public at large, his claim that he will not be adhering to canonically accepted notions of custom and law. In this early period of his life, he has already accepted the grey area that will become the color of his future writings; he starts with the pure whiteness that characterized publications before him and rejects it by adding blackness, pushing his position into issues concerning the space between.

Twain found good company in another figure that occupied a similarly incongruous state. He displayed a certain fascination with the late King Kamehameha V when he wrote "The Sandwich Islands". There, he outlined the existing dichotomies of Catholic versus heathen, civilized versus savage, the incoming whites versus the existing natives. With those categories of white and black established, he then immediately showed his appreciation for Kamehameha's ability to move between them, how he could "converse like a born Christian gentleman" and then "retire to a cluster of dismal little straw-thatched native huts by the sea-shore, and there for a fortnight he would turn himself into a heathen whom you could not tell from his savage grandfather"[4]. Twain's tone is a bit whimsical, almost envious, of Kamehameha's flexible and confusing status; he wrote with obvious distaste and sadness that such a place would be annexed by America, through a process that was seemingly bringing the "lamp of light" into the darkness[5]. In reality, Twain found that something to be ridiculed, as he sarcastically exclaimed, "We can give them lectures! I will go myself"[6].

William Keough portrays the particularly American humor that Twain frontiered as a more violent, caustic sort than that of other cultures. Violence, however, exists on a more basic human level than humor, and humor as a response to brutality is a way of removing the blackness of it, bringing a dark situation into the grey field so that it can be more easily viewed in a context with contrast. Twain addressed a "Person Sitting in Darkness" from the position of one who occupies the grey area; he did not write from the lofty tone of one who would banish the darkness entirely by shining the full power of the sun into the shadows, nor does he wish to snuff out the light entirely by covering it with overwhelming shadow. Rather, he straddled the middle, addressing both the voice of light and the listener in the dark.

"To the Person Sitting in Darkness" is a dark, bitter essay, one that can hardly be considered humorous so much as it merely contains some elements of humor. Sarcastic comments directed towards Reverend Ament, for example, "the right man in the right place"[7] serve to muddy the normally pure white image of a man of the cloth; at the same time, sympathetic speech to the listeners in the dark, "too scarce and too shy"[8], bring them out of the darkness in which they have otherwise been placed. He levels the playing field for them by causing both sides to exist in the same field of grey, one that allows a closer relate-ability once they are all just humans in the world together rather than strict representations of black and white.

He goes further to constantly point out dichotomies in order to highlight the hypocrisy that occurs when one attempts to adhere to them; his Person Sitting

in Darkness begins to learn of the incongruities that Twain denigrates when two kinds of Civilization are pointed out, an externally displayed one, "strictly for Export", and an "Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys"[9]. The Person is given a voice of his own once he starts to describe the incongruities of so-called civilized societies "with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot basket and butcher knife in the other"[10]. The Person continues to ponder such things for Twain, noting that it is "curious and unaccountable. There must be two Americans; one that sets the captive free and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on"[11]. Twain's ultimate point is that so long as such dichotomies exist, there will be incongruities, as it is impossible for man to remain firmly in either the black or the white.

The essay's bitter dissection of America's habit of violently conquering native, heathen people comes to a conclusion that is explained to the person; in particular, he states that "we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world"[12]. America has been made a muddied grey through its violent actions, bringing the country into a hypocritical and ironic state that is ripe for Twain's humor to feed upon. The joke is that there isn't a joke, but couched in Twain's sarcastic tone, the mixing of black and white becomes an object of ridicule, a situation that necessitates a humorous interpretation in spite of itself.

Once he travels too far into the black, Twain begins to lose his edge of humor. In *The Damned Human Race*, he writes almost entirely from the black, reaching a point in his travel across the grey space from which he does not see a recovery for mankind. He declares that "Man cannot claim to approach even the meanest of the Higher Animals", and "constitutionally afflicted with a Defect which must make such approach forever impossible, for it is manifest that this defect is permanent in him, indestructible, ineradicable"[13]. By both placing man in an unrecoverable darkness and situating himself in a position that no longer acknowledges the grey area, he wrote a piece that does not provide or a way out, nor any sympathy for humanity. In this, the absence of humor is apparent.

To examine Twain's spectrum of writing is to see a full range of the grey spectrum, from his early pieces that add subtle amounts of greyness in order to give some contrast to the world of black and white absolutes, to essays that spell out the grey area entirely, and the final blackness of his later writings that stand as the opposite to his initial editorials. The parts of humor that are visible are ones where the grey area is clearly visible, when both the black and the white boundaries can be seen, and an occupation of the grey space is the only position from which that view is possible.

II. The Greyness of Mark Twain (revision)

4 October 2012

It is a tempting and simple instinct of humans to divide the world into a

series of dichotomies; truth and lies, civilized and savage, sin and morality, black and white. However, it is the spectrum between, the infinite divisibility of the grey area, that is worth studying. The extremes only exist as notions, ideals that can never be realized, for one requires the context of one side in order to note the existence of the other. Acknowledgment of both reveals a vast and muddled space between, in which travel becomes possible and the hypocrisy of dichotomies can be seen. Throughout his life, Mark Twain embarked on his own journey through this inexplicable grey area, and his discoveries formed the basis of his humor.

In "The Importance of Mark Twain", Alan Gribben defines Twain as the quintessential American humorist, noting that he exists as a "crucial continuity" and a "common denominator of what we want to perceive to be the American character"[14]. Indeed, Twain's status in history stands as an almost mythological figure, a strange life bookended by two appearances of an astrological phenomenon. Charles Neider describes him as a living incongruity, both a clown and a tragedian, both an amateur and a competent professional, both an optimist and a pessimist[15]. Twain's inexplicable connection to both the darkness and the light of the world, an intimate understanding of the existence of dichotomies, allowed him to display the gradient of greys as he dilutes light with darkness and vice versa.

Twain's entry into mass publication with an editorial to *The Buffalo Express* shows his curiosity of the grey field from the start. In "Salutatory", he provides the paper's readership with a list of absolutes, such as confining himself to truth, rebuking all forms of crime, refraining from vulgar speech, etc. except when he won't[16]. This is his initial declaration to the literate public at large, his claim that he will not be adhering to canonically accepted notions of custom and law. In this early period of his life, he has already accepted the grey area that will become the color of his future writings; he starts with the clean light that characterized publications before him, that "custom is law, and custom must be obeyed"[17] and immediately rejects it by adding a little bit of darkness, pushing his position into issues concerning the space between.

Before he really settled into his position of writing from the grey, Twain studied other figures that appeared in a state of incongruity. He displayed a certain fascination with the late King Kamehameha V when he wrote "The Sandwich Islands". There, he outlined the existing dichotomies of Catholic versus heathen, civilized versus savage, the incoming whites versus the existing natives. With those categories of light and darkness established, he then immediately showed his appreciation for Kamehameha's ability to move between them, how he could "converse like a born Christian gentleman" and then "retire to a cluster of dismal little straw-thatched native huts by the sea-shore, and there for a fortnight he would turn himself into a heathen whom you could not tell from his savage grandfather"[18]. Twain's tone is a bit whimsical, almost envious, of Kamehameha's flexible and confusing status; he wrote with obvious distaste and sadness that such a place would be annexed by America, through a process that was seemingly bringing the "lamp of light" into the darkness[19]. In reality, Twain found that something to be ridiculed, as he sarcastically exclaimed,

"We can give them lectures! I will go myself"[20]. He saw the imperialistic act of assimilating and westernizing the natives as a destruction of culture; rather than criticize it outright, though, he pretended to support the cause with this exaggerated speech that more effectively showed his alarm.

William Keough portrays the particularly American humor that Twain frontiered as a more violent, caustic sort than that of other cultures. Violence, however, exists on a more basic human level than humor; it is the force that ends life while love is the act that creates it, and humor is a response to both. Using humor to address brutality is a way of reducing the darkness of it, bringing it into the grey field so that it can be more easily viewed in a context with contrast. Twain addressed a "Person Sitting in Darkness" from the position of one who occupies the grey area; he did not write from the lofty tone of one who would banish the darkness entirely by shining the full power of the sun into the shadows, nor does he wish to snuff out the light entirely by covering it with overwhelming shadow. Rather, he straddled the middle, addressing both the voice of light and the listener in the dark.

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The core of this essay is an identification of dichotomies, which highlight the hypocrisy that occurs when one attempts to adhere to them; his Person Sitting in Darkness begins to learn of the incongruities that Twain denigrates when two kinds of Civilization are pointed out, an externally displayed one, "strictly for Export", and an "Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys"[23]. The Person is given a voice of his own once he starts to describe the incongruities of so-called civilized societies "with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot basket and butcher knife in the other"[24]. The Person continues to ponder such things for Twain, noting that it is "curious and unaccountable. There must be two Americans; one that sets the captive free and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on"[25]. Twain's ultimate point is that so long as such dichotomies exist, there will be incongruities, as it is impossible for man to remain firmly in either absolute state.

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III. Feeding the Comedian Ego

2 November 2012

Media producers can be split into two categories: ones that appear to inform, and ones that appear to entertain. Under the guise of providing information, propaganda and advertising developed for American post-war mass media in a way that impressed upon the still-infantile state of its consumers that specific rules and standards must be met. However, this same generation proved to be an apathetic, distrusting, rebellious one; they soon turned to entertainers as their primary source for media consumption. Consumers' active choice of preferring entertainment over information gave comedians of the era a new sense of importance, which in turn fed an egotism for that spotlight that would not have existed with any other sort of audience.

Post-war America experienced a rapid proliferation of media which instigated a shift in the way communication propagated. Between technological innovations that allowed a more direct transfer of messages from creator to receiver and economic growth that increased accessibility to information channels, a culture of widespread, simultaneous media consumption sprang into existence. As the number of consumers rose, media producers noticed that they wielded a power to influence a larger percentage of the population than ever before, even as it gave them greater responsibility of presenting information in a reliable manner.

The growing threat of nuclear war in the 50s created a tense and delicate environment that called precisely for a more responsible media. In "Explosive Issues: Sex, Women, and the Bomb," Elaine Tyler May described this as an "era of the expert"[28], as well as "a heightening of the status of the professional"[29]. When Americans needed someone to tell them everything was going to be okay, along came the Federal Civl Defense Administration; it gave agency to women by presenting them a sense of power over their livesso long as they did as they were shown through programs such as Jean Wood Fuller's "Home Protection and Safety." During that period of uncertainty, this act of showing people a method of taking back control was intended to ease the population; if women followed the instructions presented to them by those experts in the media, "they would face the danger of an atomic attack without fear"[30]. With that, Americans were taught to trust the media, that magazine articles, radio broadcasts, and television programs would provide them with the information they needed to know in order to protect themselves from an otherwise mysterious and terrifying threat.

Soon, this purely informative presentation blended with more commercial endeavors; fear-reduction became a marketable commodity, and "[c]ontractors commercialized the idea by creating a variety of styles and sizes [of bomb shelters] to fit consumer tastes"[31]. Those contractors piggybacked on Fuller's domestic safety programs, worming their way into the category of media producers that inform the viewer; people who feared nuclear attack could protect themselves with a well-stocked pantry, good first-aid skills, and the purchase of a commercially-produced bomb shelter designed by experts. This resulted in the culture of what Jackson Lears described as being symbolized by a "pink lamp shade"; an object that was widely accessible to a significant portion of the population and provided a "specter of conformity"[32]. During the cold war, such conformity gave some Americans the comfort they needed, but not all of them.

Dissatisfaction with cultural conformity existed during the time, as evidenced by the very essay from which Lears lifted that symbol; he agreed that the "attack on corporate-induced conformity was pointed and well placed"[33] even as he didn't seem to see alternative options presented other than the forced acquisition of a pink lamp shade. He went on to paint a picture of post-war America that involved "theatrical social performance," "the irrelevance of politics," a "system that fed the body but starved the soul"[34]. In other words, he set up a situation in which the general American public was in desperate need of something to fill the frustrating space left between fear and an uncomfortable status quo.

Enter the comedians of post-war America: Mort Sahl, Vaughan Meader, Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, and countless others. Characterized by a quickness in wit and performance, more improvisation, and a distinct self-awareness of the art of stand-up comedy, this new generation of performers demonstrated an egotism that had yet to be seen in the field of humor. While educators and advertisers were leveraging the growing reach of the media to influence the massesfor better or for profitcomedians took advantage of the wider audience in order to entertain more people faster. As commercialization of the media piggybacked

on educational resources, entertainment piggybacked on both, benefitting from the heightened emphasis on the importance of a media-dictated culture. They experienced a quick rise to success, owing both to the relative ease with which their performances could be brought to the public through television, radio, and records, and to the public's willingness to accept political humor as a way of addressing their dissatisfaction with a hegemonic state.

The introduction of comedians directly into the homes of media consumers meant a sharp increase in audience size; Peter Robinson noted that they "were quickly able to popularize their new and daring brand of political humor in front of a virtual audience that numbered in the millions"[35]. The act of performing already requires a base level of narcissism; the ability to simultaneously reach far more people than a physical venue could ever hold gave rise to a new level of ego-boosting. This dramatic shift in the ratio between content producer and content consumer changed the character of comedic performance. Additionally, consumers were given a sort of agency over the media; innovations in recording technology meant that "they could conveniently and cheaply re-create their own music or comedy performance space at home"[36]; comedians became thusly idolized and propagated.

Ultimately, it was these comedians who counteracted the hegemony described by May and Lears; with them, the public found an outlet and voice for their frustration against an unsympathetic status quo. At the same time, they achieved an awareness of their power as critics of the system. The combination of a massive audience that needed and loved them with their self-awareness of importance fed the growing ego of the comedian, which resulted in the development of a brand of humor unique to post-war America.

IV. The Importance of Being Obnoxious

16 December 2016

The self-publishing platform, lack of regulation, and relatively anonymous means of content distribution provided by the internet allows for certain types of humor to develop that could not flourish under any other circumstance. In particular, the nature of the internet promotes a sort of derisive humor, as it lowers the social risks normally present in making and enjoying distasteful jokes or deliberately offensive commentary. Through the collection of articles on *The Best Page in the Universe*, pseudonymous humorist Maddox demonstrated that on the internet, sometimes it's effective to be an asshole.

The Best Page in the Universe started in 1998, and has remained stylistically unchanged from its original format of bland white text on a black background with no other features other than the occasional colored text for emphasis and badly drawn graphics to illustrate particularly rude points. The only perceptible modernization is the addition of buttons at the bottom of each article that allow the viewer to link that particular page with one's social network of choice. His website followed a common path of websites; it started as a personal space for rants that spread by word of mouth until he reached the status of internet su-

perhero for his unapologeticallly scathing essays about punching women, killing babies, and the depressing stupidity of mankind. Curiously enough, and perhaps indicitive of the egotism and self-awareness frequently seen in high-profile comedians, Maddox pointed out his own fame in the aptly-titled article "How is it possible that a guy with a small penis and a hairy back is more powerful than Pepsi on the Internet?" in which he charted money spent on advertising versus Alexa.com page ranking. Although he never offered an answer to that question, he painted the incongruous image that "corporate sites have promotions, games, and discounts, yet more people come to this site every day and read stupid bullshit about how big my balls are"[37].

Maddox's questioning of his own position on the internet highlights the recurring theme seen in a history of political humorists, that "[t]he humor arises out of the gap between the cultural ideal and the everyday fact, with the ideal shown to be somewhat hollow and hypocritical, and the fact crude and disgusting"[38]. In fact, the internet itself may represent the final frontier of Rubin's Great American Joke; it presents a platform where anyone with a computer and a connection can place content in the same space, which often places eloquently worded commentary next to incomprehensibly illiterate babble. Even if a particular website only contains polished, edited, and serious material, there's no stopping a user from having that page open next to pictures of cats that look like Hitler. It is, as Rubin says, "a society based theoretically upon the equality of all men...and the incongruities are likely to be especially observable"[39]. In such a world, the fact that Maddox's crude and frivolous articles display a measurably stronger hold on viewers than carefully crafted online brands show that there must be something viewers want that he is providing.

In *Cracking Up*, Paul Lewis points to "an eagerness to provoke and be provoked" as the basis for derisive humor, that jokes have evolved to having a specific target and agenda in mind[40]. Once this crosses into the realm of aggressive and violent jokes, he asserts that it "bars the butt/victim from joining in the laughter and puts the viewer in the awkward position of laughing with a monster, refusing to do so, or sustaining an uneasy ambivalence"[41]. An interesting twist on Lewis's butt wars is that Maddox explicitly targets his readers in his attacks. Following an April Fool's prank in which he drastically altered the format of his website, he posted "How do you dumbasses manage to breathe?" as a response to the flood of bewildered, concerned, and sometimes outraged responses to the appearance of his website. He ends the article with "[a]fter reading a few thousand emails like the ones above, I seriously considered taking down my site and just posting links to animal porn for you retards. You're all idiots, and I've lost what little respect I've had for you"[42]. Despite being constantly openly hostile and degrading to his readers, people keep coming back, as evidenced by the page view counter on that article; it reads over two and a half million visitors eight years after it was originally published.

Perhaps what brings readers back, though, is knowing that they personally were not the ones writing Maddox stupid emails. Despite the fact that Maddox directly addresses the reader and unabashedly generalizes all of his readers to the same label of ignorant twats, any particular reader can enjoy the jokes by

knowing that he only really meant people stupid enough to send him stupid emails. Like Lenny Bruce reading court transcripts as part of his stand-up act, Maddox publishes choice examples of hate mail, offering both dismissive commentary and scathing rebuttals. While other writers on the internet will leave open the option to comment on articles directly, Maddox maintains the old-fashioned method of publishing letters-to-the-editor as he sees fit; his audience has no way to verify the authenticity of any submission, and those emails become further props and objects of ridicule.

Despite the generally immature nature of his articles, Maddox often touches on political topics with serious social consequences. At the heart of his articles is an impressive ability to get extremely angry at virtually anything, and he treats political issues that strike him as unforgivingly stupid just as badly as he treats his readers who can't tell when he's pulling an April Fool's joke. Corruption of the police, hypocrisy of activists, partisan hackery, and censorship are frequently recurring topics, particularly as they highlight the incongruities at the base of every Great American Joke.

In addition to just ridiculing politics, though, he has leveraged his readership for calls to action. During the January 2012 web-protests against the Stop Online Piracy Act, he wrote "I hope SOPA passes," an article that, contrary to its title, didn't promote the highly controversial bill, but instead questioned the effectiveness of protests that only raise awareness of issues without making attempts to effect change. His refusal to participate in the protest by blacking out his website for a day was "because it doesn't address any problems, only the symptom"[43], referring to his belief that even defeating one particular bill wouldn't make a difference because lobbyists would just push a new one. Not willing to mark himself a hypocrite for describing problems without offering solutions, he compiled a list of companies known to support the bill, encouraging his readers to boycott them, and additionally opening up discussion for boycotting tactics and other effective ways to fight the greater problem at hand. He asserted that defeating SOPA was "like trying to stop a cold by blowing your nose. It's time we go after the virus"[44].

Peter Robinson explored an ongoing relationship between comedians and politicians through their influences on the public; he concluded that "the political comedians would be invested with the sort of comprehensive sovereignty that presidents and candidates can only dream of: political influence, economic power, and cultural celebrity"[45]. In Maddox's case, his status as a celebrity comes first, and his cult following generates the rest. He directs a naturally abrasive persona towards producing humor that is, on the surface, degrading and offensive to virtually everybody, but he wouldn't have the popularity that he does if there wasn't a current of truth running through his words. His essays are satirical, gross exaggerations of problems in society that people are already aware of, only he challenges how people think about them in addition to pointing out that they exist.

Notes

[1]Gribben, 48
[2]Neider, xv
[3]ibid., 1
[4]ibid., 25
[5]ibid., 28
[6]ibid., 28
[7]ibid., 284
[8]ibid., 286
[9]ibid., 287
[10]ibid., 289
[11]ibid., 291
[12]ibid., 295
[13]DeVoto, 228
[14]Gribben, 48
[15]Neider, xv
[16]ibid., 1
[17]ibid., 1
[18]ibid., 25
[19]ibid., 28
[20]ibid., 28
[21]ibid., 284
[22]ibid., 286
[23]ibid., 287
[24]ibid., 289
[25]ibid., 291
[26]ibid., 295
[27]DeVoto, 228
[28]May, 155
[29]ibid., 156
[30]ibid., 161
[31]ibid., 162
[32]ibid., 44
[33]Lears, 45
[34]ibid., 45
[35]Robinson 122
[36]Robinson, 121
[37]Maddox
[38]Rubin, 262
[39]ibid., 263
[40]Lewis, 6–7
[41]ibid., 25
[42]Maddox
[43]ibid.
[44]ibid.
[45]Robinson, 214

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Chapter 2

Trajectories in Photography

Did you ever think about the time when we didn't know what things looked like if we'd never been there?

Fall 2013

I. Analysis of Wilson Hicks: "What is Photojournalism?"

Hicks occupied a position that gave him a substantial amount of authority on photojournalism; he contributed to the medium in a way that made him a witness to the evolution of photojournalism, just as the photojournalist was a witness to news stories. That said, it also put him in a position of power as a firsthand reporter on something he helped to create. Overall, he writes in concrete, absolute statements, often presenting questions or counter-arguments immediately after his point and then addressing them—an apt reflection of his position as the journalist of photojournalism.

To address the question he posed in his title, Hicks breaks the problem down into two approaches: first, he defines photojournalism from within by excising its components and asserting how each segment functions as part of the whole medium; second, he describes photojournalism externally by providing an overview of the social and technological developments worldwide that needed to occur in order for photojournalism to have a place. Both approaches are necessary for a complete statement on an otherwise complicated medium with many variables and expectations; the initial technical definition comes first as a foothold for the reader to understand the social structure that comes second.

By Hicks's technical definition, photojournalism is a combination of words and pictures; more directly, it is one unit of expression that affects both the eyes and the ears of the reader (words, he states, as a means to stimulate the ears, and pictures to stimulate the eyes). This unit combines with what he calls the 'X-factor'—the ideas, memories, and beliefs carried by the reader—in order to

form an experience that is greater than what each of the three segments could have provided alone. With this, then, the existence of an audience is crucial to the success of Hicks's photojournalism. In the production of photojournalism, he ascribes each piece to a separate role: the writer, the photographer, and the editor, that even if one person holds multiple roles, all three must exist in a balanced, cohesive group in order to achieve success.

Additional to the three segments of a unit of photojournalism, Hicks deconstructs how the photograph itself contributes to the experience. He points out that in reality, human vision is limited, affected by the mind's capacity to observe and process imagery; the camera, in that sense, has a superior perception of the visual world, able to mechanically record images without the burden of emotions. Furthermore, photographs gave people the ability to examine an image free of the immediacy of reality, and thus allows the formation of a new sort of emotional response not previously possible. It's this particular power of photography that Hicks claims as a major contributor to the success of photojournalism.

In tracing the social trajectory of photojournalism, Hicks attributes the turning point to the technological advancements offered by the Leica, a camera that was so small and unobtrusive compared to previous machines. Previously, the presence of a camera unavoidably changed events due to the physical intrusion of a camera and all its related entourage, but once the actual act of photography was simplified, entirely different photographs were possible—rapid sequences, low light, and less arranged shoots, to name a few. Coupled with the ability to distribute photographs in print media, photographs became a more integrated part of journalism, rather than just an illustrative or design element to accompany text. With the Leica, photographers were able to speak to the point that Hicks makes about why photography is effective: the non-intrusive images showed scenes that viewers could interpret as if they were there, but without the problems of faulty perception and memory. Additionally, photographers themselves could hone and rely on their instincts for capturing images with the potential to have this effect.

The interesting part about Hicks's account of the development of photojournalism, specifically with regards to *Life*, is that his syntax does not give away, or even imply, that he was involved heavily with its production. However, the breadth of detail and absolute descriptions give a sense of witness to that development; it's as if he wanted to see photojournalism in the way that the camera saw events, with the ability to record and not judge. That said, the selectivity of the camera applied to Hicks's position as well; the more absolute his statements, the narrower a path he must take, and his perspective did not allow intrusions beyond the definitions he carefully laid out.

II. Flakey Imagery

12 December 2013

Humans are visual creatures and scientists are ever hungry for more infor-

mation. So, when Wilson Bentley, a quiet farm boy from Vermont, presented the world with photographic evidence of something that is now recognizable as the canonical representation of a snowflake, the world accepted his vision as the ideal that has always been desired. His images were the result of a deep personal obsession with what he believed to be the true, pure form of a snowflake, regardless of what actually fell from the skies. Despite that, the scientific community was willing to overlook flaws in his method for the sake of accessing data they previously did not have, and popular culture enthusiastically received the iconic image that filled a gap in the collective visual vocabulary.

The popular notion of a snowflake is a perfect, symmetrical figure—a flat, six-pointed shape that schoolchildren can cut from a carefully folded piece of paper. This iconic form is used as a universally recognizable symbol for snow, from winter-themed decorations to weather alerts that rely on the concision of pictograms rather than text. However, there was no widely accepted representation of snow prior to the publication of Bentley's photographic work in 1901. A spotty history of snowflake imagery turns up very few instances of recognition of that shape, being mostly drawings rendered from some combination of magnified viewing with the memory and imagination of the artist; snowflakes melted in a fraction of the time it took for a drawing to be made, and thus creating a faithful representation was both tedious and not really possible.

At the age of fifteen, Bentley started his pursuit of the snowflake in 1880 with a microscope that was given to him as a birthday present. He took an approach similar to the snowflake documentarians of the past; he would catch snowflakes as they fell, look for one that seemed properly suited for illustration, then attempt to draw it freehand while observing the rapidly deteriorating form under a microscope[1]. He found the process frustrating, especially as it highlighted the fleeting nature of his subjects, which he considered "miracles of beauty; and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others"[2]. Here, though, he had already begun his process of manipulating the image of a snowflake; the sort of crystal he was attracted to was an extremely rare form, produced only under very specific weather conditions, and only through a lot of luck and patience was he able to capture one for his examination. As he was a hobbyist, not a scientist, his culling of ugly snowflakes could hardly be criticized.

Once Bentley started taking photographs of his favorite snowflakes in 1885, his work took a different form; he was still only photographing snowflakes as a hobby, since his primary job was to work on his family farm and he could only entertain his need to document snowflakes as part of his leisure time. Still, he devoted as much time as he could every winter to chase his obsession, keeping detailed notes on weather conditions each day, as well as precise technical information about each exposure he captured[3]. This level of detail and commitment to the task was a significant advantage to his entry into the world of scientists, even though he had no scientific background himself. Anyone who could manually produce hundreds of individually-captured snowflake photographs, as well as produce such an expansive amount of information about each one, easily gained the respect of the scientific community of his time.

A similar body of work produced just prior to his birth failed to gain serious recognition; an unnamed woman produced a book of drawings and poetry about snowflakes, and submitted them to a Harvard professor for his advice. Even as he respected the artistic merit of her work, he suggested that she present the drawings in a more scientific tone, "otherwise the whole would be useless to students of nature, and only to be looked at as an elegant toy, fit to excite the curiosity, but not to impart information"[4]. Her work was apparently not well popularized, perhaps as a combination of not reaching the right audience at the right time, and not having enough appeal as either art or science.

Bentley's work, on the other hand, saw almost instant success once it fell into the hands of meteorologists. Beginning in 1899, he started selling his snowflake photographs to scientists at five cents per print, including his detailed technical notes with each image. The prints were made from duplicate negatives, which he carefully etched in an attempt to improve the appearance of the details of the flake; because it was virtually impossible to capture an entirely clean image of a perfectly symmetrical, unbroken snowflake, he allowed himself to modify the photographs that were ultimately to be shared, just to make sure that his vision of the pure snowflake was sustained. The resulting photographs were so impressive that his modifications were generally overlooked in favor of being able to study the overall body of work.

At this stage, he was very open and forthcoming about his methods, including notes that his photographs neglected to show an average view of snowflakes. In a letter to meteorologist Abbot Rotch included with an order of photographs, he readily admitted that "the average forms are much less perfect & beautiful"[5], and described what sorts of weather conditions produce the more perfect snowflake he sought. Despite this open declaration of his selectivity in providing specimens for scientific study, his images were rapidly acquired by the scientific community. Rotch's response did not even comment on Bentley's obvious bias for aesthetic beauty; he only encouraged Bentley by paying for extra photographs and spreading the images to other people who were studying weather phenomena[6].

By 1902, Bentley became known for his skill in photographing snowflakes, a task that had not been performed so successfully due to the technical challenges with the equipment available at the time. As a result, his work was in demand by multiple publications and studies; on request, he produced a ten page article with 255 photographs of snowflakes for the *Monthly Weather Review*, a scientific journal of meteorology, and thus solidly set himself a place at the scientists' table, despite still being a potato farmer from Vermont. For that article, he understood the need to document a more average selection of snowflakes; despite that, he had a hard time shaking his desire to show only the snowflakes he found worthy. He admitted

> This proved the most difficult task of all, because the old habit of seeking for the beautiful and interesting, rather than the characteristic types, was very difficult to overcome. For this reason, I fear the winter's photographic record portrays far more fully the general

> character of the beautiful and interesting than it does the broken or unsymmetrical types. And yet there are few, perhaps, who after viewing the feast of beauty filling these pages will regret our shortcomings in this regard[7].

In the current standards of scientific publication, it seems implausible that such obviously aeshetically-driven work produced by someone with no training in scientific process should be published as legitimate research.

Bentley was producing his photographs at a time when the role of photography was not yet well defined in any field—artists looked at photography with great skepticism, scientists had yet to understand its potential utility, and no real commercial venture existed. In that respect, the fact that Bentley's background did not have any obvious ties to the current modes of photography might not even have mattered. At the time, no one knew how to categorize the act of photography; all that was relevant was that someone had managed to cheaply mass-produce images of something that previously hadn't been easily seen with such clarity, and for the sake of scientific and cultural progress, that work was accepted regardless of its haphazard provenance. In other words, he filled a need that society had, during a time when both images and information were insatiably consumed in a post Industrial Revolution era.

There's a relationship that exists between the photographic process and the notion of objectivity. An attractive belief is that the camera's inability to create a falsehood and photography's reliance on the visual existence of the actual object being photographed implies an indisputable source of objectivity. In Bentley's case, he attempted to capture an objective representation of a subjective beauty—that being snowflakes in a state of purity, untainted by their existence in the real world. Rather than document the specimens he considered faulty and unworthy, he distilled his vision by not even allowing those natural faults to make it onto film at all. However, the reality of snow does not lie in what he decided to show; it lies in a more average, realistic selection of snowflakes that never appeared in his portrait of snow. Furthermore, the images that he chose to share were individually manipulated to display his belief of each snowflake's ideal beauty; even though he made unmodified, original negatives available for inspection, the point is moot because only modified images ever entered the popular view.

Regardless of what real snow actually looks like, the process of making a recognizable illustrative image necessitates an abstraction of the original form into a simpler, more appealing shape. Ideography is just that—turning ideas into simple pictures. The picture only needs to bear a slight resemblance to the original, and also needs enough pervasion in popular use to become accepted as a canonical graphic. Manipulated or not, Bentley's photographs provided a crisp graphic form that was easily mimicked in illustrations, and also experienced the pervasion through cultural media that allowed the form to become popularized. Art does not require objectivity in order to be successful; Bentley's photographs as just works of art were accepted because he was able to show objects of beauty in a way that were never seen before. Conveniently, his photographs showed

snowflakes in a way that made for an obvious ideograph.

Bentley's work was only successful because it came during a period of shifting standards of objectivity. In current scientific communities, his work wouldn't stand a chance at gaining recognition as a rigorous documentation of a natural phenomenon due to his selection bias and manipulation of captured images. However, at the time he was producing his work, such a body of images did not yet exist, and there were no facilities capable of creating them. The fact that there was such a sheer volume of images that no one had seen before, coupled with his detailed technical notes and willingness to practically give the work away, created exactly the sort of situation for his work to become popular. His obsession with the pursuit of cataloguing his own notion of beauty and perfection resulted in the canonical snowflake image today.

Notes

[1]Blanchard, 24
[2]ibid., 22
[3]ibid., 44–45
[4]ibid., 61–62
[5]ibid., 68
[6]ibid., 68
[7]ibid., 88

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Chapter 3

China and its Neighbors

Defining the interior by identifying the exterior.

Spring 2014

I. The Disputes of Grey Areas

10 February 2014

An examination of boundary areas often provides insight into issues that occur on one side of the divide or the other. The fuzzy transitional zone between the grasslands used by mobile Mongolian herders and China's stationary agricultural settlements is one instance of such a space. The physical landscape of that area is characterized by a combination of constantly shifting ecological borders as the sand dunes of the desert-steppe environment encroach onto arable farmlands. This changing landscape created disparate ways of life that engendered different cultural ideologies towards the usage of space. One group was the pastoral nomads who valued the flexibility of following the lands that provided for their sustenance; the other, sedentary farmers whose carefully organized cultivation of the land required a clear delineation of the world around them. Ultimately, the proximity of these two disjoint cultures demonstrated some of the problems that came from such an adjacency.

The Han had a sense of space that defined emptiness as a negative concept[1], an attitude that was reflected in the very language they used to refer to bounded versus unbounded areas. As a civilization that frequently needed to defend itself against invading forces, they developed a culture of maintaining walls and explicit boundaries in order to better identify the separation between themselves and some sort of other. Since it is difficult to fight against the nebulous and unbounded void, empty space became a fearful object, something that the Chinese needed to harness and tame in order to maintain control over their borders, both physical and psychological. As a result, the very existence of delineated space became a marker of Chinese sovereignty, reflected in highly structured urban planning, border defense, and agricultural practice.

As a result of these deep-seated needs for the explicit delineations of space, unbounded territories seemed intolerably disorganized to the Han; disorder meant a lack of control, a lack of control meant unproductivity, and unproductivity was wasteful. Thus, they saw the unmodified grasslands to the north as an area of waste, but also containing potential, capable of conversion to productive work through a process of land cultivation and the civilizing of its inhabitants. Regardless of the actual usage of that land, the Han needed to organize it into something that they recognized as valuable.

Furthermore, the fact that such wasted land was occupied by other peoples proved a challenge to the Han. It was difficult for them to view the nomadic Mongols as anything other than aimless wanderers of the grasslands, taking up space that could otherwise be put to better use if they instantiated a systematic cultivation of the area. Since the herders were benefiting from land that they had not worked to cultivate themselves, the Han saw their existence as an affront to their values of labor[2]. In other words, they thought of the Mongols as primitive, lazy squatters, and the way to fix this problem was to impose order onto the chaos by organizing the wandering nomads into a structure that could produce measurable amounts of work. Through this structure, the Chinese sought to demonstrate their status as a more modern, developed civilization, bringing all people under its rule into a high standard of organized and productive living.

From those attitudes, the Chinese government made a series of policy decisions to impose a Han-centric sense of structure and organization onto the northern grasslands region. The primary effect of these policies was to decollectivize the Mongol way of life; where the herders once shared the open grasslands as one continuous area, the land was instead divided into discrete parcels. An enclosure policy was instituted to prevent livestock from grazing freely on areas that the Chinese agricultural scientists identified as vulnerable to erosion, as well as provide a system to track the work value of each parcel. The smaller plots of land could, in theory, be more easily monitored for levels of productivity and stop potential damage resulting from overgrazing of the grassland. Livestock and plots of land were then assigned to individual households depending on the number of animals a particular plot could support, and families were given incentives to adhere to these boundaries[3].

As part of the enclosure policy, households that were more productive were given subsidies by the central government. Though the subsidies were intended to encourage adherence to the new order of cultivation, they had the side effect of creating a wealth gap, as families that produced more could buy more fencing materials, secure their own plots against their neighbors' livestock, and let their own animals graze on unsecured land. So, the policy in practice allowed households to enclose their land to stock up good grazing areas, saving that grass for when the rest of the pastures grew thin. In addition to causing more land erosion by allowing the open grazing that the enclosure policy was supposed to restrict, feuds often resulted from disputes over unclear property lines and animals that strayed too far into the wrong plot[4]. Eventually, earning work points and subsidies became the main motivating factor for the Mongol herders who wanted to survive; in order to protect their own interests, each household

had to find ways to be more productive than their neighbors, rather than tend to their flocks in the cooperative traditions.

Clearly, such sweeping changes could not have happened without resistance, as was demonstrated by the students in *Wolf Totem*. They grew to sympathize with the Mongol way of life and lamented its destruction by Chinese policies. When the main characters returned to the grasslands after being away for thirty years, they were struck by the changes of the landscape when they saw fenced-off and untouched grass pastures, dried rivers, and ragged-looking animals[5]. The effect of the enclosure policy was obvious to them; parcelization of the land had disrupted the normal grazing patterns that had allowed the grasslands to remain sustainable. Chen commented bitterly on the transformation and noted the short-sightedness of sacrificing the land for a quick economic boost, since he understood that "the grassland could not return even if the subsidies continued for the next century"[6]. In their time of living with the Mongols, they knew that the survival of the grass was the key to the survival of the people, so when the land suffered, so did its inhabitants.

Beyond the ecological disruption that Jiang's characters condemned, they witnessed a cultural shift that came from the imposition of the new Chinese order. As youths, they drew a parallel from the differences between Mongol and Chinese horses to the differences between Mongol and Chinese society. Even though they were Chinese from the city, they recognized and valued the spirit of the Mongol horses, which they considered an untamed strength that could defeat even the greatest acts of labor. They called the Chinese workhorses "stupid", and regarded them as slaves that could only work and provide service to their masters, ultimately unable to defend themselves from abuse; these characteristics quickly became a reflection of the Chinese people who raised those horses[7]. When they returned to the grasslands thirty years later, they found great disappointment in the fenced pastures. "In the past, who would dare build a fence on a grassland famous for its Ujimchinn warhorses?" asked Chen[8]. The irony was that they once believed that the spirit of the Mongol warhorse could overcome any attempts of domestication into a sedentary, labor-based lifestyle, but the wild horses of their youth had been wiped out by modernization.

Though a work of fiction cannot be relied upon as a statement of historical accuracy, observable cultural damages and practical ecological disruption did result from the act of decollectivizing the northern grasslands. These were highlighted by some of the ramifications of enclosure policies on the grasslands; instead of keeping livestock confined to specific grazing areas, herders used enclosures to preserve the pastures assigned to them and allowed their livestock to overgraze unenclosed areas into severe erosion[9]. Additionally, the power imbalance created by introducing subsidy incentives allowed some families to prosper and others to fail, and generated conflict and disputes over property boundaries between groups that would otherwise have lived in peaceful cooperation[10]. These issues were compounded by the drastically different cultures attempting to survive on the same piece of land, as their incompatible ideologies made it difficult for them to reconcile their respective needs.

Despite the numerous problems caused by Chinese policy decisions regard-

ing the use of the northern grasslands, it is difficult to see whether or not there were other options to address the needs of the Han society. The Chinese could not tolerate a grey area that was neither clearly Mongol nor Han, thus Inner Mongolia had to be brought into the Chinese status quo in order to satisfy the Han cultural preference for clearly delineated spaces. Although the landscape itself was a shifting environment, because it was a Chinese territory, the people there needed to function with the Chinese way of life, which meant highly organized agricultural practices, fenced plots, and measurable work.

Ultimately, the practical needs of a growing population required more land dedicated to producing food and resources; the steppes were seen as an area that could provide for the Chinese, if only it could be tamed and organized. The proximity of Beijing to the steppes region meant that the central government was very much affected by the ecological changes of the Gobi Desert; continual desertifcation and destruction of the northern farmlands presented noticeable problems to the Chinese, from raging sandstorms that buffeted the capital city to wide-ranging droughts that starved their crops. The preservation of as much farmland as possible was crucial to their survival. This necessitated agricultural practices that could be measured, studied, and adjusted according to a strict scientific rigor. Things could not be studied unless they were held in place and monitored, thus the enclosure policy presented an implementable solution to move the region into a more modernized status.

II. A Culture of Disunity

3 March 2014

As a nation with an expansive territory, China's borders contain a necessarily diverse collection of cultures. This presents obvious difficulties for creating and maintaining a unified state; the further from China's geographical and cultural center, the more complicated this issue becomes. The Uyghurs and the Mongols are very different groups, both in their semantic distinctions from the Han center and their syntactic differences as ethnic groups. However, they have the shared experience of being peripheral groups that have undergone policies and reforms instituted by the Chinese government in an attempt to bring them under a unified national identity. How either group responded to this force of change depended on their respective cultural backgrounds.

The geography of the Mongol region favored the development of communal, migratory societies. Harsh steppe landscape meant a delicate ecology, with grasslands that were prone to damage from overgrazing and erosion. As a result, the Mongol lifestyle followed an annual migration pattern that allowed them to raise livestock carefully without causing great disruption to the land. This necessitated a strong community spirit and awareness of the overall health of the region, which promoted bonds across the steppes that solidified the Mongol identity. In spite of their mobile lifestyle, the Mongol social structure developed as collaborative and homogeneous once they achieved a unified state.

In addition to geography, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan throughout his-

tory contributed to the collective Mongol identity. Almaz Khan describes this as "one of the basic identity symbols for both the Inner and Outer Mongols"[11]. He goes on to trace the early period of the region, when there did not yet exist a strong sense of Mongol unity, until Chinggis Khan's invocation as a revered ancestor of the people in the region served as a way to legitimize the claims of power among different tribes[12]. In more modern times, Chinggis Khan represents the Mongol people's struggle for status within the Chinese state; it exists both as a common thread of identity for the Mongols themselves, and as an object that the central government either revered or suppressed depending on its relationship with minority cultures[13].

Regardless of how Chinggis Khan has been utilized to represent the Mongols, the important thing to note is that such a symbol exists at all; the existence of a commonly-accepted cultural hero speaks to the existence of a commonly-accepted cultural identity. Without that identity, there would be no hero. The strength of such a symbol feeds into the strength of the ethnic consciousness, and vice versa. So long as the symbol of Chinggis Khan existed, the Mongols were able to relate to a sense of unity springing from a single foundational icon of their history, no matter how the mythology of that icon was treated.

Regarding the Uyghurs, such a united identity did not exist prior to the PRC designation of the Uyghur ethnic group. The Xinjiang region is mainly uninhabitable desert, across which travel is a great hardship. Settlements flourished around individual oases, which could more easily sustain life; communication to other oases occurred less frequently the longer the distance. Social and family groups remained very tightly bound to local areas, as pride for one's home oasis came from the practical matter of survival; without a large, geographically close network of connections, one was unlikely to prosper. Due to the distances between oases, trade and cultural mixing happened more often across the border into neighboring countries than within the Xinjiang region[14].

Due to such disparate cultural values and isolated communities, the Uyghurs never felt a sense of unity with other people called Uyghurs. Even as the Uyghurs must address their unavoidable status as a people united under the Chinese designation, they still found difficulty reconciling their disparate histories, and maintained loyalties to their home oases above their connection to the idea of a larger ethnic group[15]. In addition to the problems of cross-oases identities, the Uyghurs experienced distinction between classes that presented even stronger disconnects of cultural values and self-identity. The intellectuals considered themselves as Turks before any other group, the merchants as pan-Chinese, and peasants as Muslims[16]. Most notably, no group considered themselves primarily Uyghur, the term that the Han assigned to all three groups.

With the lack of a homogenous identity, the Uyghurs also have not maintained a common cultural hero. Rudelson identifies a number of historical figures that have maintained some status as Uyghur cultural heroes, but none of them managed to take hold of a universal position as something all the Uyghurs identify with. The poet Abdukhaliq "Uyghur" mostly resonated with intellectual nationalists[17], eleventh-century scholar Mahmud Qasqari represented thestrong Islamic identity among the Uyghurs[18], the former Xinjiang leader Saypidin Az-

izi fell out of favor with the majority of Uyghurs for sympathizing too much with the Han[19]. Even if one particular figure received heavy support from one group during one period, the disparity between the self-identification of each group resulted in highly polarized responses across the region.

Thus, as individual ethnic groups, the Mongols and the Uyghurs differ not only in the specifics of their language and cultural values, but also in how they fit into the syntax of their designation as ethnic groups. Most notably, the Mongols present a more homogenous identity, while the Uyghurs span multiple groups of people who are not yet able to relate to each other under a common identity. In part, this is owed to the relatively new status of the Uyghurs as one designated group, as the Mongols were similarly scattered before they were unified under Chinggis Khan. However, the syntactical differences of the two groups provided a logistical challenge for the Han, whose unification policies toward ethnic minorities seemed to assume a universal and homogenous application.

As part of establishing a system of minority unification, the Chinese central government developed an educational system to both preserve ethnic boundaries and enforce national unity. A national standard education in such a diverse country has two major boundaries to overcome: linguistic variance, and cultural incompatibility. To address those boundaries, primary education in areas with a high population of ethnic minorities included language-specific schools meant to enforce the usage of Mandarin as the standard language for the Chinese nation[20], and study programs emphasizing the values and histories of the Han people[21]. They also allowed special provisions for students with particular dietary and lifestyle requirements, such as separate dining areas and options for language education.

For both the Monols and the Uyghurs, an education system that emphasized Mandarin meant that in order to succeed, students must learn Mandarin as their primary language; however, in both cases, this was often at the cost of losing their own culture. Somewhat ironically, by increasing their connection to the Han group, it hurt their connection with their own group; Mongol stuents who attended a special ethnic boarding school "felt that it lowered their otherwise equal social status with the Han and other ethnic groups"[22] and Uyghur intellectuals seeking to improve secular education and modernization "struggle to preserve their Uyghur culture and language while maintining and developing the ability to compete on a national level" [23].

In addition to the negative effects of pushing the Mandarin language onto ethnic minority students, the creation of special ethnic schools increased the awareness of those groups, both within the groups themselves, and from the Han that encountered them. A mixed Mongolian-Han boarding school saw that "students of each group formed a separate cultural circle, within which they gradually built up mutual trust by sharing similar experiences of language, ethnicity, and economic status"[24]. Rather than building cross-cultural connections, the mixed schools emphasized the differences between ethnic groups, effectively alienating one group from another.

Among the Uyghur intellectuals, a split was created solely due to the in-

troduction of Mandarin-based education; students were permitted to choose schools in either Uyghur or Han, resulting in the creation of separate cultures within the intellectual class depending on which language one used throughout school. Those who studied in Mandarin were viewed as not true Uyghurs, while those who studied in Uyghur were considered to have recieved a poorer education[25]. This internal division would not have existed if not for the ethnic eductation system imposed on the Uyghurs; even though the literacy and success rates for students who studied in the Han language increased, the conflict introduced into the region as a result bred distrust and arrogance within the Uyghurs themselves.

Ultimately, though the Mongols and the Uyghurs are noticeably disparate groups, they shared the experience of the effects of being defined as ethnic minorites by the Chinese central government. The Han provided them with a system that rewarded those who favored a pan-Chinese nation, as those willing to participate in the educational and economical systems of the center would prosper, while those who resisted found hardships. However, to accept that system meant accepting an ethnic designation imposed from an outsider; this was an easier thing for the Mongols, who had a unified identity on which that designation was based, but still presents a problem to the Uyghurs, who are only developing their identity as this proccess occurs.

III. The Assimilation Question

23 April 2014

Minority groups generally live under the rule of a state run by a central majority group; because of this, they face the decision to either maintain their separation in order to preserve their cultural distinctions, or assimilate into the dominant culture in order to access status and privileges that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. As an examination of these issues, we can follow the trajectories of three well-documented minorities: the Hui, the Amish, and the Manchu. These three groups share the traits of self-identification as a unique group with a common history, show visible cultural markers, and are recognized by their respective ruling states as distinct community with shared values and interests.

In modern times, all three live in close proximity to the majority center, inhabiting areas that, if not explicitly mixed with the majority, are at least not separated by significant geographic features. All three also engage economically and politically with the ruling state, with representation in occupations that allow them to trade and interact with outsiders, as well as participating in government and bureaucratic concerns. This has provided them ample opportunity to assimilate, yet they still exist as separate groups.

Dru Gladney refers to the Hui as a nationality created during the census projects of the late 1900s, combining the historical knowledge of foreign Muslims who traveled to China as merchants during the Tang dynasty with the establishing of a nationality-based hierarchy during the Yuan dynasty by the

Mongols[26]. The modern notion of the Hui shows both a sense of this foreign origin and adherence to traditional Islamic living practices; while some communities align more with their Arabic ancestors and others are more devout in their religious practice, the ethnonym of *Hui* nonetheless calls on an identity that the Hui are capable of identifying with. In short, even though explicit definition of the Hui minority group in terms of common traits and cultulral markers proves problematic, no one doubts that the group exists.

A curious feature of the Hui, in contrast with most other ethnic minorities in China, is that their population is noticeably dispersed across the country, occupying more areas and forming a larger percentage of the minority population in those areas than other groups[27]. In addition to their geographical distribution, the Hui do not have their own language or dialect, and instead adopt the linguistic traits of their neighbors. Gladney mentions a specific group of Hui he interviewed who were "culturally indistinguishable from the minority group with whom they live, but they identify themselves as Hui and are recognized by the state as members of the Hui nationality"[28]. While some Hui wear head coverings that indicate their religious beliefs, many Hui do not, and instead dress as their neighbors do. The Hui, then, somehow manage to maintain their status as a distinct group, regardless of circumstances that make it difficult for an outsider to determine what makes them different.

One of the main things that sets the Hui apart from non-Hui is their notion of *qingzhen*, an ethnoreligious concept of purity and truth that is difficult to identify outside of daily practical living. In some areas, *qingzhen* manifests as an abstention from pork products, attending Islamic prayer services, recognizing ancestral lineage from historically documented Muslims, and maintaining traditional Islamic dress. Not all of the Hui adhere to all of these characteristics, but recognizing *qingzhen*, regardless of its actual practice, is a cultural marker of the Hui that both gives the group a self-identification and allows outsiders to see what makes the Hui different in terms of the social ideals of the group. Additionally, by giving themselves this ideological definition, the Hui make it easy for then to refer to things that are not Hui—namely, things that are not *qingzhen* could not be Hui. Adhering to *qingzhen* gives the Hui a tangible practice to preserve, which they maintain through their marriage habits, living spaces, and dietary practices.

Similar to the Hui in this regard, the Amish live according to an *Ordnung* that defines acceptable living practices that maintain a limited amount of contact with things that are worldly and sinful[29]. They maintain a lifestyle that separates them, ideologically and physically, from that which is not what they are, and thus hold a very clear boundary between themselves and the other. In practical terms, this can be seen in an avoidance of electricity and other modern conveniences, a moderation of behavior and emotion, plain dress and hair as regulated by one's church, and a commitment to maintaining the community[30]. The Amish are easily identified in modern American society by observing those cultural markers.

Although the Amish strive to hold themselves apart from things they consider worldly, they accept that it is both impractical and unnecessary to live in a

completely isolated state. Different levels of interaction apply for different levels of worldliness; for example, "interaction with other Amish, with Mennonite and related groups, or with other religious groups is different from interaction with the world"[31]. As a necessary part of their survival, they partake in trade with the outside world for groceries such as sugar, salt, and flour, and sell their excess production of grain and hay on the market[32]. Additionally, as they do not own automotive forms of transportation, they rely on trains and buses for travel over distances that they cannot practically cover with their buggies. Specific limitations vary between invididual churches and communities, but in general, their *Ordnung* dictates acceptable interactions as is needed for their survival. As a result, they inevitably come in contact with the outside world in social and economic contexts.

From those interactions, as well as existing within a larger state as a small minority group, the Amish have encountered problems of maintaining their *Ordnung*. Hostetler describes them as "suspended between competing value systems, subjected to enticements from the external world...confronted with special problems of coping with regulations and bureaucracies"[33]. It becomes impossible for the Amish to ignore the social and technological changes of the world beyond their community, which induces them to examine their own lifestyles; since they cannot possibly sustain their separation from worldliness while still holding on to their Amish identity, they have no way to assimilate without ultimately losing their value system.

In addition to the temptations of modern living, the Amish have to contend with a legal system that is not always well-suited to their beliefs. Regulations from the American government most significantly affect their educational practices; the Amish generally do not school their children beyond eighth grade, as after that age, children are expected to remain with their families and develop good relationships with work and familial responsibilities[34]. Pennsylvania law, on the other hand, required school up to age seventeen, with an exception for children from farming families that lowered the age to fifteen; frequently, Amish were barred from this exception until the formation of an Amish vocational school that allowed a compromise[35].

Despite the problems the Amish face by maintaining their separate way of living as minorities, the overall Amish community continues to flourish with an increasing population growth owed to a high birth rate and low attrition. The ideals of their community give them a distinct living space that is incompatible with outsiders, and they preserve this community by holding a high amount of value to the very existence of their community. Amish do not marry out to non-Amish[36], provide their own education to their children, and refrain from using technology or services that are antithetical to their belief system.

At a glance through the history of the Manchus, there exist similar features in their status as a minority group. The Manchus maintained an explicitly segregated living space, as well as a roster of all members of their group within the established banner system; like the Hui and the Amish, the Manchus knew who was part of them and who was the other. However, their existence as a group depended mostly on their assertion of their group, without any larger

ideological beliefs supporting their segretation; they used the Manchu name as "a highly poliicized ethnic label" that referred to the notion of the Manchu, rather than identifying distinct lineages or cultural markers[37]. The existence of the Manchu label implied almost exclusively social distinctions, such as their status as a ruling class and membership within the banner system.

It can then be argued that the Manchu identity was far more of a political contruct than that of the Hui and the Amish, and for that reason, the modern view of the Manchu makes them harder to distinguish as a noticeable minority group outside of that official designation. The main aspect of the identity that set them apart was the banner system itself, which carried the Manchu intoo the Qing dynasty while the militaristic and linguistic aspects of their lifestyle faded[38]. The downside to holding the institution itself as central to a one's group identity, though, is that once the institution was removed from the collape of the banner system, the main aspect of Manchuness went with it. Following the Qing dynasty, the Manchus had difficulty maintaining a strong sense of identity, once they became too far removed from the shared history of the banner institution[39].

In summary, the Manchus were less successful at maintaining their status as a separate minority group when compared with the Hui and the Amish. The religious purity and dedication to an ideal that transcended a material existence gave the Amish and the Hui a greater sense of importance to their separateness; it wasn't just that they needed to preserve their community values, but that they *had* values to preserve at all that set them apart from the Manchus. The Hui encountered social friction for maintaining their pork abstention amidst a society favored pork products as a primary protein source, and the Amish face constant temptation to modern conveniences and political pressure to conform, but both groups place their committment to their identity at a higher value than accepting assimilation. For the Manchu, their acculturation seems to lead to an inevitable assimilation; within the Chinese ethnic minority designation, they still exist as a valid ethnic group, but as the distance from the period of the banner system grows, those distinctions become more of a formality than a recognition of identifiable cultural differences.

Notes

[1]Williams, 671–672; connotations of the terms 'huang', 'ye', etc.
[2]ibid., 672–673; discussion the Han ecological identity
[3]ibid., 680; enclosure policy details
[4]ibid., 684–685; some of the practical responses to the appearance of fences
[5]Jiang, 507–511 of *Epilogue*
[6]ibid.,, 510
[7]ibid., 305–306; in a conversation between Yang, Chen, and Zhang as they observed horse mating fights
[8]ibid., 510
[9]Williams, 680–681; noting the expansion of fenced land versus large herds overgrazing unfenced land
[10]ibid., 684; notes on violent incidences regarding fences
[11]Khan, 248
[12]ibid., 252

[13]ibid., 267
[14]Rudelson, 40
[15]ibid., 143
[16]ibid., 118
[17]ibid., 145
[18]ibid., 153
[19]ibid., 155
[20]Borchigud, 282
[21]ibid., 293–294
[22]ibid., 286
[23]Rudelson, 122
[24]Borchigud, 288
[25]Rudelson, 127–129
[26]Gladney, 17–18
[27]ibid., 27–28
[28]ibid., 33
[29]Hostetler, 82–83
[30]ibid., 84
[31]ibid., 111
[32]ibid., 113
[33]ibid., 255
[34]ibid., 188
[35]ibid., 262–263
[36]ibid., 145
[37]Elliott, 353
[38]ibid., 354
[39]Rigger, 211

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Chapter 4

Capitalism and Individualism

Also known as, there's no such thing as the American Dream; we'll all kill ourselves trying.

Fall 2014

A notable side pursuit: while reading Benjamin Franklin this semester, I happened to travel near his grave, so I took a selfie with i and sent it to the professor. Later in the semester, I ended up passing past the graves of multiple other authors, so I made a map of every grave of authors from that class, and started collecting them on road trips.

I. The Bootstrapping Factor

8 October 2014

Max Weber builds a model of the particular flavor of American capitalism that depends on a baked-in sense of duty, that all should adhere to a divine order for everyone to fulfill his potential and duty towards an economically-viable calling. I argue that he's missing a key point in his analysis: a defining feature of the workaholic drive that separates Americans from other modern capitalist cultures is the feeling of necessity that derives from building something out of less than nothing. This extends to the belief that failure is unacceptable, a lack of progress is tantamount to failure, and, in extreme cases, that failure can mean death. It is not only economics that motivates Americans to work harder than they are expected to, but a culture that develops out of being forced to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, or die.

If we remove money from the equation, Weber's framework collapses. When he credits the "devotion to a 'calling' of moneymaking"[1] as a major factor in the successes of notable American cultural heroes, he neglects to understand

that the moneymaking was only incidental to the way in which they conducted their lives. It happened to be that Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, and others were *highly talented* at generating massive quantities of wealth, but their deeper motivations came from a driving need for self-improvement.

A better example illustrating the bootstrapping factor comes from examining Frederick Douglass's trajectory throughout his life. It wasn't until later in his life that money even entered into his calculus; prior to that point, he pursued a desire for self-improvement and knowledge acquisition before he even understood what implications and opportunities that would give him. He would not have realized the power of earning his own wages[2] if he had never realized the possibility of being a free man. He would not have realized the possibility of being a free man if he had not learned to read[3]. He would not have learned to read if he did not get the sense that it would somehow *improve* his status as a person[4]. Because the events happened in such a sequence, it could not possibly have been an economic motivation that drove Douglass to better himself.

As Douglass develops a further self-awareness of his own peculiarity, he recognizes that it was in fact his encounter with adversity that provided him the circumstances that made him more than what he was born into. He defines similar 'self-made men' as ones who "are obliged to come up...in open and derisive defiance of all the efforts of society and the tendency of circumstances to repress, retard, and keep them down"[5]. Money had nothing to do with it; Douglass *had* to raise himself out of his circumstances because it was what he needed to do in order to survive. Progress, for him, meant life, while failure to progress would have killed him. In his case, it was quite literal; once his self-education progressed to a point at which he could no longer accept slavery as an option, he decided that he would rather risk the punishment of death as a result of striking back against a white man than allow himself the inhumanity of being whipped as a slave[6].

Douglass doesn't credit only adverse circumstances for his success, though; he knows that his status as a black man and former slave means he had much more to work against[7]. For that matter, he identifies that great men are ones who work without regard to anything other than work[8], and the best way to incite work in an individual is to put him in a situation that seemingly prevents him from getting what he wants[9]. When he tells us that we should measure a man's success "not by the heights others have obtained, but from the depths from which he has come"[10], he wants us to acknowledge that the lower someone starts, the greater their path of accomplishment can be; it is not enough for a man to live with what life has given him, but that the *process* of achievement shows more about his character.

You could say that one of Weber's points is that the money itself is not the sole motivating factor for the spirit of modern capitalism[11], and thus I am deliberately skewing his argument, but his framework deals primarily with the sense that there is something about the economic pressure of capitalism as a strictly unavoidable part of one's environment[12] that fostered the mindset we are trying to understand. I claim that he has oversimplified the problem; the driving force behind the spirit of capitalism is the need to create something

out of almost nothing, and money just happens to exist as a metric by which we can measure the amount that one has succeeded. Douglass's life, while an extreme example of the bootstrapping factor, reflects a larger pattern of early American culture; in order to survive and prove themselves capable of existing as a legitimate nation, they had to overcome a lack of infrastructure and established roots that their European spectators had long solved.

II. Misunderstanding the Misunderstood

9 October 2014

Through his living experiment detailed in *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau calls into question the cultural expectations of a capitalist work environment. In spite of the fact that he spent that period of his life living physically and socially separated from the community, he placed himself in a position to uniquely observe and cogitate on the pressures to acquire capital. *Walden* provides a viewpoint that challenges ideals about work held by the people who frustrated Thoreau, and why they participate in a society that perpetuates that particular culture. He wrote from the only perspective that such observations were possible, and that was a perspective that made it equally hard for people to understand him.

While describing his day-to-day life at Walden Pond, Thoreau constantly demonstrates his reliance on the existence of a community beyond himself, such as borrowing an axe to build his house,[13] buying shoes from the town store[14], even seeking shelter at a neighbor's house in a storm[15]. In doing so, he communicates that he is not in fact just some hermit in the woods, but aware of commerce and industry outside of his personal bubble and willing to interact with such. Yet, he also claims that he spent his Walden time living only by his own labor[16]. This is a paradox that comes off as hypocritical, and a confusing front for the reader to process.

Thus, *Walden* provides a viewpoint that is difficult to discuss or reconcile. Thoreau comes right off the bat saying that readers of his book are poor, ignorant, dishonest[17], and that not all of Walden will be relevant to all people[18]. By doing this, he's setting himself up to be misunderstood from the very beginning—a fact of which he is clearly aware, and often reiterates. He even gives an entire case study of meeting someone who is not at all equipped to take on his lifestyle[19], as if the reader required an explicit illustration of how at-odds with the status quo Thoreau's life presents.

Despite detailing how he has avoided a majority of gainful employment, Thoreau does not order the reader to reject work, but to work carefully, in a way that does not damage others. He is convinced of the ability of everyone to provide for themselves in a way that uses less of everything—money, energy, food, etc.—and that the economic system of capitalism leans on the fact that people don't, and instead are wasteful and have mindless approaches to work. In essence, this is a direct response to what the sociologist Max Weber later defined as the spirit of capitalism. In reference to the mindset required to sustain a

capitalistic system, Weber asserts that "[b]ecause these ethical qualities were of a specifically different type from those adequate to the economic traditionalism of the past, they could not be reconciled with the comfortable enjoyment of life"[20]. Thoreau believed that the capitalist work ethic damaged some core sense of the human condition.

"I have made some sacrifices to a sense of duty"[21], he responds to accusations of selfishness in his rejection of capitalism. This is the duty that others have imposed on him, to work hard in order to earn capital and use that capital to contribute to the greater well-being of society. In doing so, he defies what Weber later observed as a dependence that the capitalist order has on a "devotion to a 'calling' of moneymaking"[22]. That same duty is responsible for much of the social problems he is trying to make his readers aware of, but in superficial ways, he comes off as a freeloader, someone who manages to get by with at least as much (if not significantly more) appreciation for life as someone who 'works' far harder. He does not dispute this; it's the most important part of his point that he wants to get across, even at the risk of appearing selfish and irresponsible.

The difficulty with all of this is that Thoreau already provides a rebuttal for any criticism one could possibly give him, and builds himself a careful world in which he cannot possibly be wrong. By already anticipating criticism, he removes the reader's agency in reacting, such that *Walden* comes off as one long-winded ramble with no real ground for a critic to stand on. He doesn't ask for a conversation, and he claims that he's not telling anyone how to live their lives, but by stating his observations as if they are so blatantly obvious, he makes people angry with the same stroke that removes their ability to defend themselves. There is no way to argue with someone who has already set up all possible arguments. Ultimately, the challenge he presents readers is impossible to ignore.

III. A Collective Dreaming

14 November 2014

The American Dream is a vague concept that combines an unavoidable status quo with the expectation that anyone who manages to rise up from the crowd will achieve some sort of success. In order for that Dream to stand, a harmony must be struck between the ideal of universal self-fulfillment and the practical needs of a collaborative society. We can witness this struggle through the dramatization of fictional stories in which characters who try to set themselves apart are mowed down for, ironically, trying to achieve their version of the American Dream. On one hand, we have Edna Pontillier of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, whose attempt to engage with her discovery of the Dream from a position of its infrastructure ended in failure; on the other, Linda Loman of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* presents us an option for a woman to succeed in a context where only the achievement of men seem to matter.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will first clarify my usage of the words 'success' and 'failure'. In describing characters, I use these terms based on their

final states within the narrative work. Specifically, I refer to Edna's ending as a failure because in taking her own life, she has made it impossible for her to ever achieve anything further. On the other hand, I describe Linda as having succeeded in that she survived the course of the play, and thus her character is allowed the potential of progress beyond the narrative. In a bit of an over-simplification, we can also view either story as a morality tale, through which the authors show us that characters live and die as a consequence of how they choose to accept their places within the framework of the American Dream.

As a concept, then, the Dream is something with both a theoretical ideal and a practical reality. The ideal is that all people shall achieve a status and recognition based on the fulfillment of their human potential, as James Truslow Adams defines in his historic analysis of the American condition[23]. In reality, though, people still need to adhere to some sense of social structure and organized positions, because there is no guarantee that every person will always end up with both the potential *and* desire to reach a state that allows them to exist harmoniously with other people. That framework forms a status quo in which all participants are unavoidably involved; Chopin and Miller, then, explore the possibilities that lay within individual human interactions with that framework.

With all this in mind, an obvious question appears: Why did Linda succeed, while Edna failed? We can examine how each author set up their characters; as a narrative device, both characters started in a situation that seemed the opposite of their result. Edna was placed in a life designed to succeed, with a husband more than capable of financially supporting her[24] [25], friends and children that mostly adored her, and a support network of people to take care of her immediate physical needs[26] [27]. Linda, on the other hand, seemed doomed to fail from the start, as her husband doesn't respect her[28], their financial situation is in dire straits[29], and both sons seem destined to be useless louts.

In both women's cases, though, they occupied a position within their context as just part of the infrastructure of someone else's Dream; neither of them were expected to engage in pursuits independent of their family unit's best interests. At a superficial level, it seems as if the women of men were excluded from pursuing the Dream at all, but I offer that the American Dream is one that is pursued as a collective whole. The fulfillment of the Dream depends on the strength of its framework, which means there is no room for someone to step outside of their role.

This brings me to a secondary definition of 'success' and 'failure'; one who succeeds has accepted their place within the American Dream, and works towards filling just that potential and nothing more, while one who cannot accept their position will ultimately fail in the process of trying to escape. There's a bitter irony in this interpretation in that the Dream itself encourages stand-out, individualistic pursuits, but for these two women characters, their starting points are locked into place, and their only freedom is to decide whether or not they can accept that.

We can answer the question posed earlier by taking both of these definitions together; Edna, as the character who failed, did not accept that she must exist as just another leg propping up a society she could not even understand, while

Linda allowed herself to become the tireless supporter of the burden of a failing family. The irony of both situations further highlights the tragedy of these women's roles within the American Dream: Edna refused to accept her success, and thus she failed; Linda unconditionally accepted her failure, so she succeeded.

If the heroic position is occupied by a man on the path to win at life, women exist as part of the implicit infrastructure for the American Dream. By allowing Linda to survive through the tragedy of Willy Loman, Arthur Miller shows us that there is a way for women to succeed in the fulfillment of the American Dream. Chopin shows us the other option, as Edna's failure stems from the fact that she had entered into a position that required her adherence to a framework that depends on its own self-perpetuating existence. The American Dream is not one of individuals, but one shared with everyone who dreams it, and it cannot support itself without the cooperation of its component parts.

IV. The Immigrant Ethic and the Spirit of Escapism

14 December 2014

At the core of Americanism is a dream, described by James Truslow Adams as the belief that all people have the capacity for self-fulfillment[30]. This is an ideal built out of the demands a culture places on itself when one of the parameters of its founding is to choose to escape from an unacceptable lifestyle and take on the risks that come from plunging into the unknown. It is a paradoxical belief that still manages to sustain itself, because its very structure dictates that to reject it is to reinforce it. In short, the American Dream is a self-propagating concept that rewrites the fear of failure into the desire for success.

In the 1990 Nintendo game *Super Mario World*, each level is a linear maze with an explicit entrance and exit. Some levels have secondary exits that require the player to notice an abnormality in the map and exercise some creativity to exploit it. Towards the end of the game, though, one of the key levels breaks this model; the obvious exit does not unlock any forward progress, and there are no visual clues to hint the location of a secondary exit. The only way to move beyond this level is to fly far off the edge of the screen, out of the visible playing field, and wait to land on a small island that contains a hidden door.

At age eight, I had little ability to deal with this; I only found the secret exit because someone who watched me struggle with the level insisted I try flying off the screen. "If you die, you die, so what do you have to lose?" I was assured, and I followed those instructions because my only other choice was to fail to beat the game. Later, I understood that this approach was what immigrants, including my own parents, needed to believe in order to stake everything on their dreams and start a life in a new world.

Prior to the founding of America, Benjamin Franklin already presented a success story—arguably, the first great American success story. His timeline is one that glorifies working ceaselessly, whether or not he even did the same

himself. That narrative of declaring one's starting circumstances as undesirable and finding the means to escape is one that has been repeated and romanticized through countless historical figures and fictional heroes in American lore. It's an obsession that stems from the subtext presented in Franklin's way of life—it's not just that working hard is the true path to success, but that it requires a preceding step: first, you must choose to change your circumstances.

Obviously, not everyone makes that decision, or at least not at the magnitude that Franklin did. It is simple to come up with an explanation; most people fear failure, described by Sennott as "the most uncomfortable phenomenon of American life"[31] in his study of problems imposed by American class divisions, and most people do not experience a level of desperation in their lives that is sufficient to demand change. However, this just emphasizes the effects of those who do decide that the only way forward is to stake everything on a leap of faith.

Such a drastic decision fuels the momentum of immigrants, who are perhaps a stronger product of this Dream than those with much longer generations' worth of history tied to America. Regardless of their originating culture, the immigrant narrative shares a common thread: failure is an impossibility, because it is simply not an option to not make it in the new world. You fly off the edge of the screen, or you die trying. Immigration is a radical form of escapism, a nuclear decision to up sticks and start over in a place that categorically *must* be an improvement. With that much at stake, there is no looking back.

The assertion, then, is that by choosing to escape, one must have already chosen success. This is clearly not an objective fact—the possibility of failure is, of course, always there. However, once the stakes become high enough, it's no longer meaningful to consider outcomes of failure, because only success matters. Specifically for immigrants, the conditions of success lay in establishing a secure life outside of their originating country, which means that failure results in returning to the old country; by deciding to immigrate, the decision has already been made to never fail. It's a redirection of the terms of success outlined by the status quo that means as long as you never return, you've made it. This is the step that counteracts the anxiety Sennott ties to the American view of failure[32]; when failure has been removed from consideration, the only paths in view lead to success.

As a culture founded on escapism, the value system shifts from outcomes to actions. If failure is removed from view, success as a concept loses meaning as well. Since it's always a possibility to throw everything out and start over, people must then derive value from something other than the results produced by work; an unavoidable fact is that there is always work, so why not base a value system on the work itself, rather than its products? Performing work is an expression of agency; making choices is an expression of freedom. What comes afterward is immaterial, because the process of those actions in and of themselves reinforces their value. In other words, it no longer matters where you go in life, but how you get there.

Thoreau says of a life, "meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are"[33]. He bases the value of a life on how

it is lived, not what it achieves, a conclusion he draws only by rejecting the standard success model of the status quo and searching for a more reliable path of self-fulfilment. This model of escapism is no different from Franklin's, only it dictates working exactly as much as one should, not to excess. The immigrant ethic is to speak Franklin, while living Thoreau.

This is the nature of the American Dream. It is a dream that demands a constant challenging of circumstances, even if such circumstances were a direct result of pursuing the dream itself. A doctrine that requires rejection of itself as a core tenet can only persist through this state of self-denial; a cultural rejection of unfavorable circumstances similarly self-perpetuates through the ideals formed by the desire to escape.

Notes

[1]Weber, 32
[2]Douglass, *Narrative*, 95–97
[3]ibid., 63–64
[4]ibid., 60
[5]ibid., "Self-Made Men", 550
[6]ibid., *Narrative*, 79
[7]ibid., "Self-Made Men", 557
[8]ibid., 556, 560
[9]ibid., 558
[10]ibid., 557
[11]Weber, 20–21
[12]ibid., 18
[13]Walden, 36
[14]ibid., 153
[15]ibid., 181
[16]ibid., 4, 61
[17]ibid., 6
[18]Walden, p. 4
[19]ibid, "Baker Farm"
[20]Weber, 30
[21]Walden, 64
[22]Weber, 32
[23]Adams, 404
[24]Chopin, 83 "I'll let Leonce pay the bills"
[25]ibid., 79, as Edna describes the house and money as all belonging to her husband
[26]ibid., 83, the maid that comes in to pick up a broken vase
[27]ibid., 72, her mother-in-law and quadroon take the children off her hands
[28]Miller, 64–65
[29]ibid., 54–56
[30]Adams, 404
[31]Sennott, 183
[32]ibid., 183
[33]Thoreau, 290

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Chapter 5

Modern China

aka, how to (or not to) form a nation after the collapse of a dynasty.

Spring 2015

I. Success and Failure in the Qing Exams

2 February 2015

In the latter half of the 19th century, China's Qing dynasty relied on an imperial system of rule inherited from a long history of adherance to an examination system that provided the structural framework on which the issues of morality and effective government were hung. While a crucial tool in training government officials, the exams also enforced a hegemony that favored strict adherence to the structure itself, which often sacrificed the value of actual moral teachings in the process. The result is that people who came from a long line of successful officials were more likely to continue experiencing success, while new individuals attempting to enter the field were frequently left behind.

We can see this split illustrated clearly by studying two separate paths of Chinese officials, Ye Kunhou and Liu Dapeng. Both men were devoted to the Confucian ideals they studied in preparation for their exams, and both men seemed dedicated to serve China and the people under their jurisdiction. They initially struggled with obtaining degrees, failing many exam cycles while their peers succeeded. However, they differed in familial history, and their subsequent responses to the imperial examination system differed in profound ways.

The success rate for degree candidates was extremely low; it's estimated by historian Joseph Esherick that 1–2% of candidates pass the first level, 2–3% of those pass the second, and fewer than 10% after that pass the third level [1]. It was standard that candidates would struggle, and common that they would fail. But despite the overall rarity of degree holders, the Ye family recorded a large number of degree holders within their members [2]; this suggests that the success of previous ancestors contributes to the success of future descendants.

Ye Kunhou had the good fortune of belonging to a lineage with strict family regulations and knowledge passed down from his ancestors; those guides and support maintained the long history of status experienced by his family members. Esherick in fact credits this longevity of the Ye lineage with some of the later members' success; he specifically cites the lineage school formed more than ten generations before Kunhou's time as a crucial factor in the education of Ye descendants[3]. Without the success that came from Ye Hua, who established the school, the Ye family may not have seen as many degree-holding members. Indeed, during the period of time following the collapse of the Ming dynasty, the family suffered from losses that included the lineage school, and a decline in degree-holders[4].

Even though Kunhou entered the examination scene after a period of low status for the Ye family, he received crucial support in his early childhood through attending the family's school and receiving strict care and encouragement from his mother[5]. Though it took him twenty-five years to pass the exams, he never seemed to lose sight of the bigger picture; during his career, he was both a devoted son and a caring official who upheld strong Confucian ideals, and he passed his success down to his descendants.

On the other side of the issue, Liu Dapeng came into the examination system with no history of family success. His father sent him to school to learn basic skills needed for business[6], but he showed enough promise in early performance that he was allowed to continue his studies[7]. In her biographical history of Liu Dapeng, Henrietta Harrison describes the education system as both "a form of moral indoctrination"[8] and "formulated by the government for examination purposes"[9]; this is precisely the split between the philosophical meaning of the classical texts and the practical realities created by the exam system that made it difficult for men like Liu Dapeng to succeed.

Liu Dapeng progressed through his education by taking the moral lessons to heart, and accepting the literal commands for filial piety and serving the Confucian ideal. His commitment to this "moral indoctrination" prevented him from performing well on the exams, as he slowly came to the conclusion that most of his classmates pursued educational success for the sake of gaining recognition, while he failed them year after year even as he endeavored to live up to the standards he was taught[10].

After encountering corrupt degree-holders, Dapeng lost faith in the system that taught people only to memorize the syntax of the classics while neglecting to learn the actual lessons presented[11]; it was only in redefining the moral code for himself that he was able to pass them at all. However, his anxieties about being the perfect scholar and the flawless son followed him through the rest of his life. As his sons progressed through their education, he pressured them to pass the exams he resented in his youth, but both of his sons ended up as failures[12].

Liu Dapeng's criticism of the imperial exam system as a whole points back to the original purpose of the degrees; earning degrees brought power to the individual, which translated to prestige for the family. The exams, then, were ultimately a system that rewarded obedience to the system itself, and reinforcing

a culture of hegemony. For people like Ye Kunhou, a family history of succeeding within the system encouraged them to continue performing well, while that same aspect alienated men like Liu Dapeng by condemning them to failure.

II. The Adaptable Prosper

20 March 2015

China in the early 20th century was a chaotic period, especially for the intellectual class of the late Qing dynasty. The Confucian system that preserved a national sense of stability had crumbled, leaving a wake of abandoned ideologies and ambiguous institutional structure. As traditional expectations for success and prosperity proved unsustainable, some members of the former elite turned to business ventures as a means to survive. However, the world of capitalism is a much different one than the feudal system of the Confucians; those who could adapt to the rapidly changing order were more likely to make it.

The collapse of the Qing dynasty was, in part, an effect of foreign influence which destabilized the interior. Most of this influence came in the form of trade, which brought with it strong pressures to modernize and accept a more global economic order. We can witness this by observing the trajectory of the Ye family branch in Tianjin, as Esherick describes changes in that city as a treaty port[13]. Between the establishment of foreign concessions, rapid development of modern public infrastructure, and heavy commercialization, Tianjin became an area well-suited for incubating the new Chinese businessmen. Ye Chongzhi was thus placed in an ideal position for this transition, due to his previous experiences in industrial management and his convenient location for accessing economic and trade centers. Perhaps he sensed that the instability of the government would not provide him a sustainable career, and thus made "the provident decision to abandon politics for business"[14]. In the early 1900s, with frequent connections to outside affairs, Ye Chongzhi got a head start on the sort of adaptations the rest of China would have needed to make.

Further inland in Shanxi, the effects of modernization moved a little slower, but were still noticeable. In 1913, Liu Dapeng gave up his teaching position and entered the more profitable coal mining business for the sake of being able to support his family[15]. Despite the fact that the Confucian-based system of the Qing era had constantly let him down, though, Liu approached doing business with the same moral code that carried him through his past failures. He frequently took on mining ventures out of a sense of altruism and good will, as evidenced in his takeover of the Shimen mine in order to help a struggling family turn some profits[16]. Members of the community knew they could rely on him for being honest and trustworthy, attributes that were critical for developing and maintaining a positive reputation in an otherwise chaotic political and economic environment[17].

Despite his earnest approach to business, there were many changes outside Liu's control that made it difficult for him to prosper. Outrageous taxation became a heavy burden in Shanxi, especially as local politicians started vying

for more power and leaned on local residents to support their campaigns[18]. Technological advances in mining equipment made a mess of the mountainside and cause the economy to favor large commercial ventures, rather than the smaller pits that Liu was involved with[19]. In the face of these changes, Liu held on to his strong moral code, as this integrity was the only thing he knew; he was thus unable to adapt to the heavily profit-based biases of the mining business, and slipped further into poverty over the next couple of decades[20].

By the 1930s, we see an entirely different approach to doing business in China. The Rong family, which established numerous textile and flour mills just before the outbreak of war, demonstrated a wider range of adaptability to changing political structures and economic pressures. This adaptability, above any other strong ties to particular ideals, was what allowed them to persist through an otherwise turbulent period. Early on in their ventures, they noticed that battles with the Japanese near their factories in Shanghai threatened their business; they keenly observed the effects of foreign presence, and counted on the fact that their properties near the concessions would be protected[21]. Once the fighting ended, patriarch Rong Zongjiang clearly recognized that the Chinese government would not protect them, as evidenced by his formation of a merchant alliance that eschewed ties to any political entity[22]. His bold statement that "China is virtually a nation without a government" [23] showed how little faith he had in politics to protect the well-being of the people.

This divorcing of the family business from national loyalties goes further than just forming an organization exclusively to protect commercial interests. After Shanghai fell to Japanese forces in 1937, the Rongs registered their mills as foreign American and British ventures, relying on an alliance with entities that the Japanese did not yet wish to disturb. After Pearl Harbor, this alliance was no longer valuable, and in fact made those mills more of a target; the response, obviously, was to revert to Chinese registration to attempt a resistance against Japanese seizures[24]. Although that action failed to prevent a Japanese takeover, it showed the Rongs' willingness to have a flexible national affiliation for the sake of protecting their bottom line. Ultimately, they regained control of their mills by going along with Japanese efforts for economic cooperation, essentially playing to their desires for Pan-Asian unification[25].

Beyond a flexibility in political dealings, the Rong family also played to fluctuations in economic demand to maximize potential for profits. During the decline in national production due to the war, they reduced loss of profits by running their equipment in small rural productions, which gave them the benefit of being able to evade government regulations that larger operations were subjected to, while also granting them access to raw materials when foreign imports slowed[26]. Their mills in Wuhan prospered during the war because they were able to secure good local sources for cotton and wheat, combining the output from both their textile and flour mills to provide much-valued bags of flour at a time when finished products were highly desirable[27]. Through such methods of commodity hoarding and playing to the fluctuating desires of the market, the Rongs managed to survive through the hard times of war, while less profit-driven ventures were unable to keep up.

In studying the Rongs' administration of their business, we find little evidence of the Confucian value system of loyalty and avoidance of wealth-gathering that dominated the previous generation of Liu Dapengs and Ye Chongzhis. While much of the Rongs' success through that period was a result of the larger scale of their enterprises and a good amount of luck, their willingness to adapt their business practices to do whatever it took to survive played a non-trivial role in allowing them to prosper. During a time when old systems have failed and new systems have yet to take root, adaptability triumphed over tradition.

III. The Fear-Cult of Mao

16 April 2015

The disastrous conditions in China following the Great Leap Forward threatened Chairman Mao's position as a leader of a revolutionary state. Sensing a potential for loss of faith in his authority, Mao needed a way to secure his status; the uncertainty the rest of the country had in China's future was turned into a culture of paranoia through Mao's exaggeration of his own fear. He was preemptively trying to root out potential betrayals within his own officials before this happened, which meant that it no longer sufficed for his policies to address actions; rather, his tactic was to create categories and terminology that meant people could have incorrect thoughts and incorrect personalities, going beyond just someone's personal history. By externalizing his own mistrust onto the rest of the country, he created an environment in which he could never be wrong, while making it impossible for anyone else to be right.

Many of the techniques used during the Maoist campaign were extensions of procedures already in place prior to the Cultural revolution. The basic format was that one would be identified as having performed some bad action, required to make a self-criticism, and then accepting punishments in order to correct that behavior. As part of Liberation, this process was crucial for the Communist Party to gain control over an entrenched old class system. This was such an effective means of establishing a status quo that it was an obvious tactic to continue for Mao's personal authority campaign.

One of the main benefits of the self-criticism process was that party members themselves were already expected to use it; in her family biography, Jung Chang mentions multiple times when her father and mother, both high-ranking Party members, had to perform a self-criticism in order to address actions they had taken that were taken to be not purely beneficial to the revolution. Through leaning on this familiar process, Mao's campaign of fear easily percolated through the party; self-criticism was always the right thing to do whenever there was a problem, and thus if Mao wanted you to self-criticize something, it was surely something that needed to be done. Similarly, if someone did not want to self-criticize, they would be in the wrong.

Mao targeted people he claimed were taking the "capitalist road", which suggested that they were people who were not yet capitalists, but seemed to be heading in that direction. By defining his enemies in such a vague, transitional

state, that label had the flexibility to cover virtually anyone it was applied to, except for Mao himself. Esherick interprets this as having "implied that the accused wished to reverse the achievements of China's socialist revolution"[28]; in other words, the capitalist road led away from Mao, and anyone who walked down that path was a traitor to the Communist Party. The problem, though, is that there isn't a literal road, and that traitors are not so easy to identify; Mao had to criminalize the act of considering treason if he wanted to prevent it from happening.

The critical factor in this is that Mao did not trust anyone, so he needed to create an environment when other people didn't trust each other, either. Chang claimed that Mao wasn't even sure what a "capitalist roader" was[29], but that he knew they existed and needed to be wiped out. His declaration of war against an undefinable category of people resulted in his loyalists scrambling to find those enemies, which meant that they were practically inventing definitions on the fly. This was a process of challenging previous structures of leadership, a constant questioning of authority that was well-suited to the teenagers and young people who were caught up in the excitement of having a revolution. The Red Guard formed as an extension of Mao's fear of enemies within the party, amplified by the common adolescent mistrust of adults.

The categories that the Red Guard divided people into reflected ideas that were already a part of the revolutionary culture; people were "red" if they were revolutionaries, "black" if they were counter-revolutionary, and "grey" if they were ambiguous[30]. While these categories started out from specific family backgrounds and occupations, they rapidly drifted into more vague definitions; anyone could be called "black" if they were no longer in the favor of the "reds". Furthermore, Mao's insistence that a certain percentage of counter-revolutionaries existed meant that the "reds" felt the pressure to fill a particular quota, which motivated them to label people as "blacks" just for the sake of fulfilling Mao's claim. The vagueness of the red/black/grey categories meant that people could be classified for reasons from personal vendettas to purely random whims.

As the Red Guard considered themselves an extension of Mao's will, they believed that Mao could not possibly be wrong, and thus they could not possibly be wrong, either. Slogans cited their support of Mao's absolute authority, and they accepted even his apparent contradictions in ideals. However, this mindless mass-adherence to one man created opportunities for disillusionment; even if it was impossible to resist the tide of red, individuals were able to see through the cracks and question whether or not this was the right thing to do. Chang tells of times she did not wish to participate in the destruction the Red Guards expected her to join, even though she signed up willingly[31]. Esherick tells of Binbin, who joined a youth work team when her father was under Red Guard detention, and quickly learned to undermine the system by deliberately breaking rules and then self-criticizing for a lenient punishment[32].

A culture based on paranoia can only go so far; while an effective short-term means of upsetting the status quo, the inevitable effects of the Cultural Revolution was breeding discontent and even stronger mistrust of Maoist policy in the long run. Mao's tactic of making vague statements about broad categories

of enemies with no possibility of clear distinctions meant that no one could truly understand what he wanted; this ultimately ended up damaging his credibility and creating a chaotic environment of uncertainty.

Notes

[1]Esherick, 19–20
[2]ibid., 27, 30
[3]ibid., 26–27
[4]ibid., 27–28
[5]ibid., 37–38
[6]Harrison, 25
[7]ibid., 26
[8]ibid., 25
[9]ibid., 26
[10]ibid., 37
[11]ibid., 38
[12]ibid., 76–77
[13]Esherick, 120
[14]ibid., 124
[15]Harrison, 113–114
[16]ibid., 118–119
[17]ibid., 122–123
[18]ibid.,131
[19]ibid., 134
[20]ibid., 135
[21]Coble, 115
[22]ibid., 116–117
[23]ibid., 117
[24]ibid., 125
[25]ibid., 127
[26]ibid., 130
[27]ibid., 133
[28]Esherick, 283
[29]ibid., 276
[30]Chang, 294
[31]ibid., 293, 307
[32]ibid., 290–291

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Chapter 6

China's Environmental Crisis

Toxic sky, land of dust.

Spring 2015

I. Nature Versus Nature Versus Nature

28 February 2015

At the heart of the Chinese language is a distinction between binaries, with terminology that grows out of phrases that delineate the interior from the exterior. It's with this linguistic structure that relationships between human and non-human entities are formed; things are either outside or inside, land is either cultivated or wild, the world is either within the confines of civilization or beyond it. We can further use this structure to consider some of the complexities involved with environmental conservation in China, as it speaks to the tension between different ideals and desires regarding the use of the landscape and its resources. More specifically, this examination is concerned with mountains, rivers, and forests—areas that are not easily made into dense human habitation, but provide resources to support a modern society. Without taking politics too deeply into account, option for such areas include cultivation for resource and energy extraction, development into designated tourist sites, or setting aside as wilderness reserves.

A brief overview of the past century of Chinese industrial and economic development shows that rapid land cultivation and resource consumption was the main trend; the driving factor of modernization was increased involvement with the more powerful Western world. Given the state of warfare and economic threats to the Chinese state, it seemed natural to focus on rapid development in order to protect Chinese interests, even though in retrospect it seems obvious to see the environmental damages caused by such short-sighted development.

While heavy land cultivation continues today, that same involvement with the West introduced additional possibilities for use of less-inhabitable areas.

It's only in more recent decades that places with high resource value were also seen as tourism potential. Tourists depend on several simultaneous factors, such as a middle class with disposable income, private transportation, and a working culture with vacation and leisure time. Additionally, tourists need somewhere to go, and developing some of the untamed wilderness areas in the periphery seemed like a natural thing to do. As observed by Pal Nyiri, tourism as understood in the Western sense was mostly absent in China until after the death of Mao[1], when it became more prevalent as a way to modernize the country and generate revenue. With a large, growing middle class, China's potential for domestic tourism provides another option for economic competition on the global market.

The combination of the environmental consequences of resource extraction and unfettered tourism creates a heavy demand on those areas, which are frequently places of fragile ecological balance that is easily disrupted. Thus, the third option is introduced: dedicate certain areas as natural reserves, where human interaction is forbidden, in order to maintain its wild status. Robert Weller points to the Western ideals about nature and the need to protect it as further influences in shaping China's approach to the wilderness[2].

However, there's a tension between the conservation of nature as a pure object separate from civilization, and a view of the wilderness as something that does not necessarily exclude humanity as a component. People who live in non-urban areas are more likely to act as stewards of the land; we see this in Shapiro's view of the environmental devastation following forcible relocation of labor units during the Great Leap Forward[3]. Ironically, these are often the people who are moved from the area in mandated conservation acts that seek to scrub all evidence of human interaction from the area they intent to protect.

Despite this act of separating humans from 'nature'—or perhaps because of it—there exists a desire in people to interact with this world. Weller provides a study of tourist responses to nature parks in China and Taiwan, where people want to touch the rocks, play in the water, and breathe the air; they ask questions about what can hurt them and what they can use[4]. In short, there exists some attracting force between humans and non-human environments. It this simply a curiosity to experience something out of the ordinary?

Perhaps not. While there is no tradition in China for modern tourism based on the commodification of scenery and constructed playgrounds, there is a tradition for regarding the environment as a force of great mystery and fascination, deserving of both fear and respect. "Can you eat it? Can you use it for medicine?" The encounters Weller describes from frustrated tour guides[5] come from the naive, but they speak fairly directly to this fascination with the environment. Those tourists are curious about this thing that they have been separated from, this 'outside' world that is beyond their current experiences but they've come to understand as something with value. It is a driving force behind all living beings to survive, and those questions are the basis for how humans figure out survival.

Thus, nature is tamed so that people can survive, but in the process, they become separated from it, and forget what it meant to live in a world where there was no word that effectively separated humanity from the environment. The creation of dedicated natural spaces, while acting on a local need to preserve the land, acts to further the gap between civilization and the wild. Since the act of civilization divorces people from the environment, it also creates a desire to fill that gap, as modern people otherwise lack the opportunity to exercise the more primal human drive to survive in a non-human world. However, the more weight given to creating a fulfilling park experience, the more emphasis is placed on the uncomfortable realization of self-domestication.

Instead of attempting to resolve this tension entirely, it's perhaps possible to utilize it as a benefit. Ralf Buckley presses on the need for tourism-supported conservation efforts, using tourist-generated revenue and visitor management to reduce impact to threatened ecosystems[6]. He makes a further point of leveraging the consumer base of the tourism industry as a way to support conservation; the revenue generated from tourism is, in some cases, comparable to what would come from resource gathering, and tourism itself is dependent on the preservation of desirable areas.

Weller presents an argument for the complicated issue of translating the word 'nature' into Chinese; the modern accepted term *ziran* does not necessarily carry the English connotations of wilderness, outdoorsy areas[7]. If one specifies 'nature' as something that is 'outside' (*waimian*), it calls to mind the separation between interior and exterior; 'nature', then, seems to separate humans from the rest of existence, which precludes the notion that humans are in any way natural. In that sense, it seems that conservation is truly impossible, as even the act of creating a wilderness reserve is an indication of human intervention. This is obviously an unsatisfactory conclusion, but the complications of this system means that it is troublesome to maintain discourse about the issues at hand.

II. For the Sake of a View

24 April 2015

In May 2014, I visited the Tianzhushan Geopark in Anhui. The area is currently under tentative UNESCO World Heritage consideration, with the most recent submission in early 2015[8], and has had status as a national scenic spot since 1982 [9]. There are no roads past the foothills just outside the city of Anqing; a set of cable cars provide transportation for visitors and hospitality workers from the entrance of the park to areas closer to the peaks. Beyond the cable cars, stone steps constructed over many decades of park management lead visitors to the best vistas, interpretive areas, and restaurants. Modern hotels, with flat-screen televisions in every room and large aquariums in the entry way, had their components carried to the mountain piece by piece by cable car, according to the receptionist where we stayed.

My mother had visited the park in 2012, and noticed that cable cars she previously ridden had vanished. When she asked a park worker about it, he

informed us that the cable cars were ruining the scenic vista by interrupting the natural appearance of the distant granite peaks ("*po huai fengjing*"). If we looked closely, we could still see the gap in vegetation that had not yet grown enough to cover the hole bored into the side of the mountain for the old cable car boarding areas. My uncle agreed with the park worker that wires hanging in the sky disturbed his view; he was having a hard time taking photographs without some evidence of Chinese overpopulation crowding into his frame, because at that level, the power lines that kept the lights on in our hotel were still visible. Of course, we'd have to climb further on carved stone footpaths if we wanted a more pristine view.

This perceived value of a scenic mountain vista causes a paradox in the management of parks; the subjective aesthetic qualities of a particular land feature gives it some sense of appeal for the visitor, but as pressures increase from a growing tourist population, the infrastructure must grow to accommodate it. Tourists need places to stay, food to eat, restrooms to wash; hospitality workers and park staff need transportation to and from their work location. As this infrastructure grows, so does the risk of damaging the aesthetic value of the park. The problem of balancing tourism infrastructure with tourism value doesn't end at the opposing desires of an individual visitor to have both a comfortable experience and an unobstructed view; rather, it extends into the foundation of a park itself, affecting the motivations of park management, and forming a cyclical reaction.

To better understand this value system, we can compare self-evaluations of parks located in China with the same in the United States; in both cases, the evaluations were compiled by internal committees involved with parks management as a response to reporting standards for maintaining UNESCO World Heritage Site status. Specifically, I present two sites for study: Wulingyuan Scenic Area, in Hunan, and Yosemite National Park in California. Both sites annually record high numbers of visitors whose primary activities are leisure and sightseeing, as the parks encompass relatively unique geological features which are of great interest to tourists; managing the impact of those visitors is one of the greatest challenges of either park. Additionally, the UNESCO designation requires each park to answer to a set of standards maintained by an outside party; differing responses to this external force provides a sharp sense of contrast between each value system.

Wulingyuan Scenic Area

In 1992, Wulingyuan achieved status as a UNESCO World Heritage site, under criterion (iii) for natural sites. The original inscription used language such as "undeniable natural beauty" and "outstanding sightseeing value"[10], phrases which are subjective judgments that speak to very specific cultural values. One has to understand and agree that "jagged stone peaks, luxuriant vegetation cover and clear lakes and streams"[11] are features that contribute to the inherent value of the site in order to accept its classification as a world heritage that must be protected. While Wulingyuan certainly had some value within its orig-

inal context prior to UNESCO involvement, it's clear that the designation has affected further management and policy decisions regarding the site. In a direct response to critical UNESCO evaluation comments in 1998, the committee managing the park thanks UNESCO for its "timely, objective, fair, and practical evaluation and criticism" that showed the committee "the importance of restoring the place to its original heritage value"[12].

The periodic report continues to detail past actions, current status, and future policies moving forward with the management of Wulingyuan, almost as a defensive statement against the 1998 inspection. Most UNESCO periodic reports do not seem to require such detailed statements, as the main reports are just to respond to the UNESCO-provided questionnaire on park status. Nevertheless, the committee acknowledges, in accordance with the original inscription, that the sandstone mountains are of utmost value, and they must "protect [the] genuineness and integrity of the peaks"[13]. It goes without saying that quarrying and damaging the vegetation are strictly forbidden; however, they needed to drill through the rock to perform "necessary construction" in order to install cable cars, elevators, and other supporting infrastructure "to offer convenience to tourists"[14]. In other words, damage to the mountains for certain reasons (the mining industry, agricultural needs, etc.) are not permitted, but damage that contributes to appreciation of the mountain's value as an "undeniable natural beauty" is acceptable.

As they are charged with protecting the 'heritage' of Wulingyuan, the report committee detailed their process from 1992 to 2002 to plan and execute such measures. This included setting up an initial 'Heritage Office' in 2000, with only three full-time employees that answered to the Wulingyuan Scenic Resort Administrative Bureau, contracting the City Planning Center of Beijing University for 6 million yuan to prepare a management plan in 2001, and increasing to four separate departments dedicated to heritage protection by 2002. This addition of resources brought the park staff to 500 employees, whose mission was to "crack down on any acts that destroy heritage resources"[15]. These measures were a direct response to a UNESCO site inspection in 1998, which described the area as "overrun by tourist facilities, having a considerable impact on the aesthetic qualities of the site"[16]. The increase in annual visitors grew from 350,000 in 1992, the year of inscription, to 1.5 million in 1998, when the inspection was performed[17]; it seems inevitable that the park would experience a growth in 'tourist facilities', as more infrastructure was necessary to support this rapid growth.

In addressing the problems outlined in the 1998 inspection, the committee acknowledged that Wulingyuan is a "precious resource which has evolved after [a] million years of development" that had only maintained its value because "people had no access to the area"[18]. As a result of the uncontrolled development, though, they worried specifically that "the aesthetic value of the heritage is being spoiled"[19]; they vowed to take immediate action to "restore the heritage to the original appearance" by removing all buildings and residents from the scenic area[20]. From 1999 to 2002, they demolished around 200 buildings (a mixture of reception facilities and residential dwellings), relocated 377 house-

holds, and cleared around 175,000 square meters of land, which cost about 66 million yuan. However, these buildings presumably sprang up as locals sought to take advantage of the growing tourism industry; the cable cars and restaurants that catered to visitors were culprits for destroying the scenery (*po huai fengjing*), but, ironically, were only there because of the park's popularity in the first place.

The park's response to simply demolish buildings and kick out profiteering tour guides seems like only a knee-jerk response to the 1998 report of compromised scenery; this emphasis on the aesthetic value of the area dominates all other notions of preservation. It's clear that they are having a hard time keeping local tourism entrepreneurs out of the park; the report claims three separate attempts to remove residents from the area, without apparent success. Their compromise, then, is to permit a few households to remain as "a picture of bucolic life", living under carefully controlled regulations that forbid them from starting commercial tourist ventures, or use pesticides and fertilizer in their fields[21]. If having unsightly shacks is truly so unavoidable, then their response is to redefine the aesthetic to include local residents, integrating the image of rural farmlands into the park's "original beauty"[22].

Despite the rapid increase in tourists causing a negative impact on the quality of the scenery, the Wulingyuan District still promotes the site through guidebooks and advertisements[23], and annual visitors have increased from about 1 million in 1996 to about 4.5 million in 2001[24]. Although it's difficult to attribute this four-fold growth to anything specific, it's clear that such a significant growth is straining the park's resources. Curiously, the report claims to have "managed to maintain a stable number of tourists" in the same section as acknowledging visitor growth and the need to control this traffic[25]. Overall, the report presents a confident tone in how well the park has been managed, which belies growth factors and illegal residents as issues that are clearly not under control.

Yosemite National Park

In contrast to the Wulingyuan report, the presentation of the Yosemite National Park periodic report of 2013 is far more terse, giving exactly the information required by UNESCO without providing excessive justifications, defenses, or promises. Nominated in 1984 under natural criteria (i) for "distinctive reflections of geological history" and (iii) for "exceptional natural beauty"[26], Yosemite stands under a similar pressure to preserve a particular aesthetic value. In his history of Yosemite, Richard Grusin simplifies the wider goal of America's national parks as "the desire to withdraw or preserve particularly spectacular natural areas from the threat of social, political, and economic development"[27]; put in a slightly different perspective, separating humanity from Yosemite was a part of the park management's goal from the beginning, so it was not necessary to emphasize that goal in the UNESCO report. The preservation of this aesthetic is such a central part of the American identity that it's completely taken for granted, and thus doesn't need to be mentioned.

The 2013 periodic report presents a chart of potential negative factors on

the park, using adjectival descriptions to outline the impact and progress on categories such as development, infrastructure, waste, and climate[28]. Unlike the Wulingyuan report, this information does not have responsive actions described inline; it is simply a list of factors with potential effects on the park's status as a World Heritage site. In following the periodic reporting format, the "protective measures" appear on a different page, and cite the precise department responsible for management, as well as specific policies that deal with park conservation[29]. It's specified that Yosemite is "the first scenic natural area to have been set aside for public benefit and enjoyment", as publicly-owned land under the legal jurisdiction of the federal government[30].

While the report does not provide numbers for visitor traffic, it does mention a "slight increase" in annual visitation over the past five years[31]; without being able to quantify this increase, it's difficult to make a comparison to the Wulingyuan visitation (though we can reasonably assume it's far less than the four-fold growth Wulingyuan experienced in a similar time slice). However, heavy traffic does not seem to present a growing problem in the preservation of the park. Referring back to the chart of negative factors, "impacts of tourism/visitor/recreation" is described as "significant" but with a "static" trend, and effects of buildings, transportation infrastructure, and pollution are either "decreasing" or "static"[32]. As a reflection of park management, this seems to describe an inevitable amount of tourist traffic, which is mostly under control by park management, and under continuing efforts to reduce impact.

The tone of the Yosemite report reads as if the committee is settled, confident in its policies, and stable in the management of the park. This is not necessarily a consequence of having more experience with writing UNESCO reports; the formation of the park from the start already dictated the sort of relationship that particular place would have with the people who visit it. Other than direct references to the UNESCO designation, the report rarely mentions beauty or aesthetics as a motivation for any of the policies at all. It's as if the aesthetic value is taken for granted as an inherent part of the park, and thus not necessary to mention in a report for external validation. As far as this report is concerned, Yosemite is a stable, well-maintained site that is set up to continue that status in perpetuity.

The UNESCO report does not adequately reflect some of the history of Yosemite National Park; the head wall of El Capitan stands as an iconic feature of the American wilderness, one that has challenged artists, adventurers, and advocates since it was shown to the Western world in the 19th century. This timing was key in its preservation; Jen Huntley credits the rise of public knowledge of these places as "sites of divine redemption and antidotes to the problems and stresses of modernization"[33], and that the features that contributed to those sites holding their power over time were the very same things that people sought to avoid. In other words, the desire for pristine, untouched wilderness in the American West comes out of a desire to escape some crushing facet of human society, while the value of those views are inextricably tied to consequences of human society. Yosemite was valued because it looked untouched, and continues to have value because keeping its untouched appearance

is part of its infrastructure.

Implications

The Wulingyuan and Yosemite periodic reports are both documents prepared internally, to be presented to an external agency. Why is it that the Wulingyuan report comes off as so defensive, with frequent reassurances and references to the terminology of aesthetics, while the Yosemite report is cut and dry, showing little insecurity about the management's ability to keep the park stable? Perhaps it is exactly that; Yosemite National Park can remain relatively stable because the aesthetic context in which it exists is fairly well-established, and the Wulingyuan District is still adjusting its value system to account for UNESCO-defined aspects of "undeniable natural beauty". Yosemite already has value as, by Huntley's description, "a 'sacred' space, separated from if not antithetical to the workings of market capitalism"[34]. Though paradoxical by nature, this value still demands that humanity and Yosemite remain conceptually distinct, and thus maintaining a sense of the sublime, untouchable wilderness.

It would be too harsh to say that the Wulingyuan District's sense of natural beauty is incompatible with UNESCO's expectations; rather, this speaks to a discrepancy in value systems that just make it difficult for the two parties to communicate their intentions. At the most basic level, it's a failure rooted first in the language itself, and secondly in the implications behind that language. In studying the Chinese relationship with the Western ideals of nature, Robert Weller points out that the modern, commonly-used phrase *daziran* is a rough translation of the English word 'nature', brought into the Chinese consciousness in the twentieth century[35]. However, there is no concise word that easily refers to 'nature' with all the connotations that a Westerner takes for granted; one can describe it in a roundabout way, like 'outside' (*waimian*), 'mountains and water' (*shanshui*), 'wild lands' (*yedi*), and so on, but those terms do not call to mind the sublime landscape of Yosemite when one thinks of simply 'nature'.

The notion of a scenic spot (*fengjing*), on the other hand, has recorded use as far as 200BC[36]. The visual impact of *fengjing* was carried by artists and poets through 16th century travelogues, which were followed by wander literati, and eventually compiled in 20th century gazetteers[37]. The *fengjing* refers almost exclusively to the appearance and shape of the view; how separated it is from evidence of human habitation does not play a strong role in its value (except, of course, when human structures visibly alter the accepted canon of that view). In comparing the two UNESCO reports, then, we can perhaps attribute the reactions of the Wulingyuan committee to a struggle in aligning their idea of *fengjing* with the Western expectations of "undeniable natural beauty".

Regardless of why people value Wulingyuan, it's still an undeniable fact that the rapid growth of visitors poses a substantial problem to the preservation of the area. This issue is not unique to Wulingyuan. Yellow Mountain in Yunnan grew from 50,000 to 3 million between 1989 and 1999[38]; in that same time frame, the total number of domestic tourists in China grew from 240 million to 719 million[39]. This growth can be attributed mostly to a rising middle class, forming

the social and economic culture necessary to promote tourism and leisure. The question for park management, then, is how to preserve the *fengjing*, without placing great restrictions on access.

One certain benefit from increasing visitor numbers is a growth in revenue, and this income feeds back into the park for preservation. But as a scenic area holds potential for tourist income, it's often the case that the same location has rich resources for industrial development. Ralf Buckley makes a few rough estimates in comparing the income from outdoor tourism with that of using the same area for industry; specifically, he breaks down the economics of river tourism and pits it against hydroelectric power. His estimates include per-trip costs for existing rafting tours on the Yangtze, and basing a theoretical number of participants by comparing current numbers to the more mature river industry in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River[40]. With a similar amount of conjecture, he calculates the value of future dam projects proposed for the same section of the Yangtze, while ignoring operating costs and assuming infinite demand[41]. The conclusion of his back of the envelope calculations is that a theoretical tourist-exclusive use of the river could bring 4.2 billion RMB per year, while hydropower might only bring in a 2.5 billion RMB return after investing in the infrastructure[42].

Obviously, this rafting vs. hydropower thought experiment is not likely to cause any groundbreaking changes in how the Chinese approach environmental tourism. Buckley finds another use for tourism in China, illustrated by Last Descents, a river guiding company that combines outdoor recreation with activism. The company was founded as a collaboration between an American kayaker and a Chinese businessman, named as a play on the river adventurer's motivation to achieve a first descent on a particular segment[43]. Last Descents targeted rivers that were threatened by dam projects, hoping to inspire influential clients to protect those regions by giving them a direct experience of the natural beauty and power of the rivers.

There's no substantial evidence as to whether or not Last Descents has had any effects on altering the usage of the rivers, or in communicating a particular idea regarding the aesthetic value of untouched nature. However, it further illustrates the point that there are distinctions between Chinese and Western ideals of the perceived value of scenery; the conflict between harnessing the rivers for hydropower and capitalizing on the rivers for tourism reflect a question of which usage is ultimately more valuable for society.

The View Persists

At Tianzhushan, it was clear to me that the park had gone through many, many revisions. We walked on paths made from large stone blocks that were carried to the mountain in the past decade, but they were laid next to old paths carved directly into the rock in the 1980s. New stone railings, carved to mimic the shape of the rock itself, sprouted over rusty scars where old iron fences were torn down. Everyone I spoke to gushed about how much improvement the park made every year; my 80-year-old grandmother, for example, ascended to the

terminus of the highest path at the base of Tianzhu Peak, with the help of the old cable cars. The changes were all geared towards optimizing the view, and building more comfortable ways to bring people to that view. Downwind of the defunct cable car station, a constant cloud of dust rose out of the construction site for an upcoming visitor's center. "Why are they building more hotels?" complained my uncle, of course, as we descended the path towards the noisy machinery. "The one we stayed in was practically empty."

Overcrowding never seemed to be a problem at Tianzhushan in the way it's described at Wulingyuan; our hotel was indeed deserted, and there were more service workers than visitors waiting in line at the cable cars. Above the immediate area of the active station, very few tourists continued walking the mile or so of steadily-climbing steps to the base of Tianzhu Peak. With fewer convenient accommodations than Wulingyuan, Tianzhushan is unlikely to experience the problems of an unsustainable visitor increase; why, then, has it been under so much construction and aesthetic revision?

Perhaps the answer lies in Tianzhu Peak's status as *fengjing*. A record of ascents goes back as far as 106BC by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, and cultural relics depicting the unique mountain profile date back 6000 years[44]. Inscriptions carved into the side of the mountain by historical figures can be seen from neighboring peaks. There's a draw to that view, not because it's a pristine, untouched fragment of nature that one can visit to escape the crushing pressures of modern life, but because it's a view that has been altered and redefined through a long line of people, and persisted through countless changes of authority. In other words, it's valued because it's been touched by society, and it's accepted that the history of all the feet that passed through it have added to that value. The endless revision and construction, while an attempt to strike a balance between accessibility and compromising the view, are, paradoxically, part of the *fengjing* itself.

Notes

[1]Nyiri, 3
[2]Weller, 7
[3]Shapiro, 140–141
[4]Weller, "Stories of Stone", 64–104
[5]ibid., 91
[6]Buckley, 9
[7]Weller, 20–22
[8]UNESCO, WHTL-5992
[9]Huang Wen, Tianzhushan summary
[10]UNESCO, Wulingyuan Periodic Report, 3
[11]ibid.
[12]ibid., 7
[13]ibid., 8
[14]ibid.
[15]ibid., 12
[16]UNESCO, 1998 State of Conservation reports, 14
[17]UNESCO, Wulingyuan Periodic Report 36
[18]ibid., 13

[19]ibid.
[20]ibid.
[21]ibid., 20–21
[22]ibid., 21
[23]ibid., 16
[24]ibid., 36
[25]ibid., 37
[26]The periodic report of 2013 uses revised criteria (viii) and (vii), respectively, but I use the original designations here to avoid confusion in comparison to the Wulingyuan site.
[27]Grusin, 1
[28]UNESCO 2013 Yosemite Periodic Report, 3
[29]ibid., 5
[30]ibid.
[31]ibid., 9
[32]ibid., 3
[33]Huntley, 3
[34]Huntley, 80
[35]Weller, 20–21
[36]Nyiri, 7
[37]ibid., 7–9
[38]Sofield, 155
[39]Ghimire, 90
[40]Buckley, 60
[41]ibid., 61
[42]ibid., 61–62
[43]ibid., 58
[44]Huang

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Chapter 7

Art, Anthropology, and Empire

The decontextualization of appropriation.

Fall 2016

I. Recontextualizing Aesthetics of a *Nkisi Nkondi*

8 October 2016

The Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh includes a room designated as "African Art". In it, visually arresting wooden sculptures sit on pedestals and inside display cases; a headdress from Guinea faces a house post from Yoruba, surrounded by stoic masks and aggressive human figures at varying altitudes. One gets the sense that there are staring faces everywhere, blank expressions peering out of glossy wood and frozen gestures. It's a view consistent with the European impression of Africa as a mysterious continent of dark faces and unwelcoming figures. We're captured by this sight; this is an art museum, after all, and the aim of artwork is to move the viewer in some way.

In this room, the *nkisi nkondi* on display bears a placard identifying it as such, translating the native term to "nail figure", and names its origin as "Congo", between 1880–1920. As is standard for describing artwork, the placard also lists the materials used: "wood, pigment, iron, ivory, cotton, and other materials". The figure itself stands approximately three feet tall, but on a chest-high pedestal so that the top of its clenched fist comes far above the head of anyone standing before it. With its open mouth and wide, bright eyes, the *nkisi* appears in mid-attack, one foot stepping forward towards the front of its glass case. However, its motion is arrested by hundreds of nails—the 'iron' mentioned on the placard—driven into its torso, feet, and neck, ringing its skull and face. Some of the nails secure chains; others are tied with bits of cloth or seed pods or shells ('cotton, and other materials', thanks to the placard). Do we

feel safer seeing the figure contained behind glass, or do its adornments transfer to us sympathy pains of having nails driven into a body? In any case, the figure, physically elevated and lit to cast jagged shadows onto the ground, calls on our empathy for the recognizably humanoid shape.

Such is the context that this particular *nkisi* creates. Because it appears in a traditional western art museum, viewers are cued to respond to it in an emotional, aesthetic framework. However, the display lacks things that artwork in a neighboring room provides; there's no attribution to the artist that created the piece, nor a statement of intent. In fact, nothing in the African Art room has this information.

Examining the process of acquiring these pieces addresses some of these gaps of information. Wyatt MacGaffey identifies most Kongo objects on display as part of collecting efforts by European colonizers of that region between 1880 and 1920 (the same time frame indicated by the placard for the Carnegie's *nkisi*). Because colonizing is an act of domination, these visually arresting objects were taken to show evidence of the primitive nature of the natives. In that sense, individuals who created those pieces were not deemed important, nor was there any need for the collectors to understand the intended usage[1]. The Carnegie's *nkisi* includes a note that it was a gift of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History; we can infer, then, that this transfer signified a re-contextualization of the figure from an artifact of a past culture to a current representation of aesthetics. This process brings such an object into its position of display in a western art museum.

To fully contextualize this *nkisi*, we then need to understand its original setting. For the Kongo people, a *nkisi* (plural. *minkisi*) is a general category of vessels that contain some sort of medicine[2], often created by a *nganga*, who was a community figure with access to knowledge of both spiritual and physical healing[3]. An individual *nkisi* can provide any of a multitude of uses, such as warding against witchcraft, capturing thieves, or curing ailments; the forms that the figures took would represent the usage, either literally or symbolically. MacGaffey attributes the variety of appearances to these different uses, along with the important fact that "if one was thought not to work it would be discarded and a new one created"[4]. This placed the *minkisi* in their original context as objects of use and function, before some of them became figures of aesthetic interest for western museum curators.

The *nkisi nkondi* in particular refers to a type of *nkisi* created to maintain social order (the word *nkondi* meaning "hunter"[5]). These *minkisi* took on the shapes of aggressive humanoids that embodied a spirit or a powerful force that could hunt down a thief or an oath-breaker. As part of the ritual usage, one would drive into it nails or blades that represented the problem one wanted solved, or swore oaths in front of it, sealing them with a token of adornment added to it. Appiah aptly points out that "[t]he extraordinary visual impact of these figures, covered, porcupine-like, with these jagged metal extrusions, is thus the result of the process of using them."[6]. The aggressive, fearsome look of a *nkisi nkondi* served as a potent visible reminder of law and order, a physical representation of the invisible forces that allowed a community to

function. Over time, the figures collected additions, growing in both its visual appearance and its spiritual power, and containing values that the colonizing forces ignored when they removed the *minkisi* from that setting.

As the Carnegie's *nkisi* left its original context, it lost its power as an object of ritual use and spiritual function. MacGaffey states that "[a] *nkisi* in a museum is inert and in fact dead", owing to, among other reasons, the fact that the *nganga* that created it is no longer alive[7]. Holes in that *nkisi* indicate places where original nails might have fallen out over time, but we cannot forget that the hairs wrapped around some of the remaining nails once came from a living creature, driven into the wooden body to represent a goal we do not know. By its display as a work of art rather than utility, it then gains power that is purely aesthetic, causing viewers to respond emotionally with no knowledge of its original intent.

The *nkisi nkondi* as seen in the Carnegie shows more than just one act of an individual's artistic insight; it's an object that represents the collective ambitions of an entire community. Originally a tool of ritual group use, it nonetheless gained aesthetic value by its nature of invoking an emotional response, both through the traditional process of physically adorning it with a symbol of a particular desire, and through its current status as an imposing figure displayed in a room of other similarly imposing figures. The placard associated with it gives viewers the barest sense of what it is, but ultimately leaves the task of understanding the *nkisi* up to the response one has to its aggressive, demanding appearance.

II. Commodifying Tattoo

5 November 2016

Samoan tattooing is a cultural practice that encompasses complicated facets of social development, colonization, and artistic exchange. In modern settings, it can serve as a visible and ineffable reminder of ethnic heritage and social standing, but it has also been commodified as artistic labor for consumption by tourists. As visual culture and globalization increased the exchange of ideas between *tufuga* and non-Samoan tattooists, issues developed around ownership and license to the motifs, rituals, and tools associated with the practice.

The Samoan tattooing process is called *tatatau*, from ta ('to strike') and *tatau* (images drawn on the body)[8]. Specifically, Samoan men receive *tatau* in the form of long, parallel lines, dark shading, and detailed geometric shapes that extend from their hips to their knees; this general patterning is called *pe'a*[9], and men often complete their *tatau* over many sessions throughout their life. The time, expense, and pain it takes to complete a *pe'a* serves both the practical reason of needing to let the skin fully heal between sessions, and as a cultural marker to represent growth, coming of age, and maturity.

tatau are created by a *tufuga tatatau*, a skilled practitioner who is often associated with a traditional guild or family where the techniques, tools, and specific motifs are passed down through generations. Traditional tools are made

from a variety of small bone combs that produce different types of lines, which are attached to a shell plate that binds it to a wooden handle. This handle is then struck repeatedly with a rod to drive the fine teeth of the bone comb into the surface of the skin, which deposits the pigment into place. Each *tufuga* has the license to create a *tatau* with variation in specific lines and motifs, depending on the shape of the body and other imagery appropriate for a particular person; still, the overall appearance and style maintains a persistent, identifiable look, which gives the impression of a longstanding ancient practice. Contemporary practitioners, both of Samoan and non-Samoan origin, are known to incorporate *tatau* imagery in their work, but largely do so with modern electric machines[10].

Traditionally, a *tufuga* would accept customary Samoan exchange goods such as *'ie toga* (fine mats), *siapo* (bark cloth), and pigs; in a modern setting, in which access to such goods has decreased (especially in the diaspora of Samoans living outside of Samoa), cash payments starting around $1800 have been accepted substitutions[11]. However, the introduction of cash into the *tatatau* process inevitably raises questions of commercialization, especially as it coincides with the rise of tourism and commodification of indigenous art.

One of the earliest Samoan *tufuga* to practice prominently outside of Samoa was Su'a Sulu'ape Paulo II, who worked in New Zealand after 1972, along with his brothers, who also worked in the United States and Europe. In addition to bringing the *pe'a* to the Samoan diaspora, Sulu'ape Paolo also traveled to tattoo conventions abroad and tattooed non-Samoans, including the highly publicized process of tattooing the artist Tony Fomison[12]. Non-Samoans were known to receive traditional Samoan tatau; European explorers and traders sometimes collected *pe'a* on their travels through the 1800s, and Tongan elites have traveled to Samoa specifically to receive tattoos[13]; however, the level of exchange in which Sulu'ape Paulo engaged with outsiders was a controversial topic for more traditional Samoans. Sean Mallon explains that "[when] non-Samoans are tattooed, a custom Samoans feel they have some authority over slips beyond their influence and control"[14].

This controversy seems to reflect on a larger cultural response to the appropriations that Nicholas Thomas describes; he mentions "[museums] crammed with indigenous artifacts"[15] as collections that represent the European collector's "curiosity" in these items. This curiosity stood as a precursor to colonialism, as it was often a response to practices deemed primitive or barbaric, and a euphemism that avoided "passing an aesthetic judgment"[16]. By collecting these artifacts for display in natural history museums, those items lost the meanings of their original contexts, and ultimately supported European attitudes towards colonizing and civilizing people perceived to be inferior.

The collecting and commodification of *tatau* is more complicated; creating one involves a tedious and painful process, which results in a design that exists on a human body. The very fact that the images are embedded in living flesh is how Sulu'ape Paolo justifies allowing non-Samoans to receive his work; Mallon reports that "[he] considered the *tatau* something the wearer could not exchange or sell"[17], which effectively renders the tattoo longer a commodity in and of itself. One cannot simply remove a tattoo from someone's body for display in

the sort of museums that Thomas described, which protects it from that specific method of decontextualization.

However, the completed *tatau* itself is not necessarily what has become commodified, so much as the labor of the *tufuga* and access to the visual motifs. In the documentary Cannibal Tours, we can clearly see tourists traveling to foreign, "primitive" places specifically for the purpose of acquiring souvenirs, which included photographs of themselves with indigenous people receiving traditional face paint. That the natives of those areas express frustration and confusion at this behavior shows that they feel something is being taken from them, even if the loss is not tangible; it's the idea of having visited that place, made connections, and acquired proof that motivates tourists to collect experiences of other cultures. Mallon notices this trend in the form of postcards, pamphlets, and Internet forums featuring tattooed Samoans, which generate outsider interest in Samoan *tatau*.

A consequence of visual accessibility to the *pe'a* is that a non-Samoan with tattooing equipment could reproduce those motifs without having any association with the traditional practice. A tattooist in Pittsburgh who worked on one of my tattoos said he often works with unfamiliar designs that his clients bring in themselves, and generally doesn't ask about their origins because he believed it was the clients' responsibility to approve or reject what imagery they wanted to wear. Meanwhile, a friend of mine who works in Denver withholds her labor from client inquiries that she deems as cultural appropriation (to which she includes mimicry of indigenous styles) because she does not want to knowingly contribute to the commodification of other cultures. The prevalence of popular "tribal" style tattoos on Westerners, as well as the range of ethical decisions made by modern tattooists, indicate ongoing issues surrounding the rights to motifs in indigenous designs.

The work of both traditional *tufuga* and modern tattooists can perpetuate the appropriation of Samoan *tatau* motifs, regardless of restrictions upheld by certain parts of the culture. However, *tatau* does not exist as a static, ancient practice; its usage has evolved continuously as a response to encounters between Samoans and non-Samoans. The exchange of imagery, economics, and nationalities inevitably changes the context of a practice that is central to a cultural identity.

III. Skin-Deep Identities

14 December 2016

In contemporary times, indigenous identities exist in a delicate state. They are defined in part by political boundaries, enforced by cultural expectations, and developed in an on-going relationship with the dominant, colonizing culture. With all of these factors in place, the self-determination of what remains essential for indigenous identities falls to how an individual chooses to present themselves; the visible aspects of their culture become a way to control and dictate their identity. Subsequently, the discourse around the artistic practices

of an indigenous group provides an opportunity to negotiate the boundaries of identity. This appears most saliently when examining issues surrounding tattoos; such a living, physical process allows individuals to demonstrate an indelible part of themselves, while challenging the lines between cultures and extending traditional practices into the present.

Contemporary tattoo culture grew from a mottled history. European explorers of the 18th century who encountered tattooed natives associated the appearance and practice with primitive, savage barbarism; in the modern Euro-American society, tattoos are often associated with "alternative" subcultures, criminals, bikers, sailors, and other rough characters. It persists as a representative of a marginalized class in either case. At the same time, tattoos hold important cultural histories and spiritual significance for indigenous groups, and provide a vehicle for modern people to explore their own identities. These different perspectives on tattoo creates a line of friction, along which some exchanges take place that raise further questions about how identities are defined.

Traditional tattoo practice as a coming of age ritual in Polynesian groups demonstrated the completion of a series of ordeals, the purpose of which Nicholas Thomas describes are "understood to harden the body...while signifying maturity of a particular phase of adolescence" [18]. This ritual of pain creates a connection that comes from a shared experience; specific motifs used in a particular tattoo serves as a permanent visible mark to make a variety of statements about the individual. In more traditional uses, this includes elaborate visual armor to signify a powerful warrior[19], marks for desanctifying the body as a sign of growth[20], and, consequently, the bestowing of a status and rank on the tattooed that contributed to their social power[21]. In more general terms, tattoos are a specific form of communication, which demonstrate cultural affiliations and belief systems. In other words, they are a critical aspect of the identity of tattooed people, allowing them to forge a connection between their bodies and their identities, as well as signal this identity to others.

In a modern setting, Polynesian tattooing practices retained its ties to traditional roots in spite of colonial efforts to eradicate it. This was a controversial issue, especially regarding the appearance and social roles of Maori women who wore *moko* (traditional Maori tattoos); Ngahuia Te Awekotuku credits it specifically as "an enhancement of Maori women's beauty on Maori terms, and it both repelled and fascinated the European viewer."[22] As a highly visible mark that represented a core part of the Maori power structure and cosmology, *moko* directly challenged what Europeans deemed desirable, and what Christians deemed permissible. Owing to the persistence of tattoo practice, *moko* survived colonization, and thus did the Maori people who carried it through.

This continuity of culture can be seen in Te Awekotuku's profiles of modern Maori women; photographs and memories of elder women with *kauae* (distinct facial tattoos of intricate linework around the chin and lips) play a significant role in the image of themselves that those women choose to present to the world. By wearing *moko* that alludes to their elders, these women maintain a social continuity that draws their pasts into the present. She also observes that "most meditate on desire and beauty" and that "transforming the body,

transforming the face was primarily about pleasing one's self"[23], an approach which highlights choosing *moko* as a deliberate act of self-determination; these women prioritize what the *moko* signifies for their own identities and histories, and other aspects—such as the circumstances around their tattooing, and how they are perceived by non-Maori—become secondary.

As the primary function of *moko* then becomes an act for women to visually display their own identities, some of the ties with traditional tools and practice fall in importance. Combined with the prevalence of modern electric tattooing machines, this has led to *moko* application by non-Maori, using modern technology. Te Awekotuku includes a personal story from Roger Ingerton, a non-native tattoo artist in Wellington, New Zealand. When he was first approached for a *moko* by a Maori woman, he was the only tattoo artist in the area. Even though he had never applied a traditional facial tattoo, he was asked to do so, and many other Maori women followed that first one[24]; this illustrates that the act of wearing that identity eclipsed the connection to the traditional practice from which those visuals originated.

In this instance, the process of the tattoo begins from a negotiation between an indigenous person with a cultural background that gives her the desire and rights to wear a particular design, and a non-indigenous person who has the skills and tools to actualize that desire. This negotiation includes selecting motifs, determining proper placement, and agreeing on a price, all of which is complicated by introducing someone who does not share the identity of the tattooed. For Ingerton, this process was clearly a difficult one; he sought advice from a local Maori elder when felt he lacked the background to work on *moko*, and described tattooing as "like diamond cutting, and a person is a million-dollar diamond"[25]. He eventually stepped back from facial tattoos, recommending that subsequent inquirers seek practitioners within their own tribes as a more appropriate exchange.

This relationship is almost reversed in some of the blending of modern Native American tattoo practice. Maureen Schwartz consulted with a variety of tattooed and tattooists, all of whom have some aspects of Native American motifs in their tattoos. She draws a relationship between those tattoos and a desire for the "primitive", which "demonstrate that notions of Indians or Indianness continue to play a vital role in contemporary American notions of identity"[26]. Her study of Richard Cioppa's approach to getting tattoos keenly illustrates this process; he started collecting tattoos of wolf imagery because he felt a connection with wolves after living on the streets[27], but he also used the image of a Native American man in a wolf skin[28]. Through using tattoos to help define himself after getting off the streets, Schwartz claims that "[t]attoos etch identity onto the body, they simultaneously erase what is already there: in many cases, what is eradicated is one's whiteness"[29]. Cioppa, by Schwartz's view, is replacing a part of his identity tied to his ethnicity with an identity he built by combining his life experiences with his perception of the symbolism in indigenous imagery.

In 2016, tattoo artist Stephanie Big Eagle (Dakota/Sioux) released a tattoo design to raise funds and solidarity in support of camps involved with the

Figure 7.1: Standing Rock Tattoo Flyer

No Dakota Access Pipeline (NoDAPL) movement at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation; a flyer that included donation instructions and the original design circulated on social media (fig. 1). From her description of the design, Stephanie Big Eagle emphasizes its role as a symbol of native people standing against a colonizing force; its central figure is a thunderbird, representing the Sioux life-giver and protection spirit, with a circle in its heart to stand for the unity of the wide range of tribal representation within the NoDAPL movement. Instructions from the artist released permission for the design to be worn by "anyone", so long as a minimum donation of $30 was made to the campaign. The design raised over $100k within its first month[30]; a registry of participating tattoo studios includes over a hundred entries from around the world.

The creation of a tattoo design for a specific event is not unique to this instance, but in this case, the unity of native and non-native tattooist and tattooed demonstrates a blurring of identity lines that challenges existing norms about who owns indigenous art. A news article from Shreveport, Louisiana, interviewed a variety of residents who, despite both a cultural and physical distance from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, decided to receive Big Eagle's design from a local tattoo artist with no native affiliations [31]. Reasons given by those who chose the tattoo ranged from reconnecting with tribal history, outwardly displaying support for Native American rights, and signifying personal changes

from participating in the NoDAPL movement. For many people, this was their first tattoo, as their association with the NoDAPL movement significantly affected their worldviews; this acceptance of the image on their skin resonates with the Maori usage of *moko* as a permanent, external representation of a profound personal change.

Tattoos exist at the border between a body and the rest of the world. Their visual nature communicates something about the wearer to the viewer, whether that viewer is a member of their tribe or not. In a modern, global setting, images of specific tattoos and motifs circulate rapidly; tattoos quickly become part of larger statements of identity, alignment, and self. For some groups, like the Maori women, tattoo occupies a critical element of self-definition, which includes the outward display of their personal imagery. For others, like Robert Cioppa, using indigenous motifs in his tattoos allowed him to create an identity that he felt proud of, by replacing parts of himself he'd grown past. On a larger scale, like those who took part in the mass acquisition of the Standing Rock Tattoo, indigenous tattoos become a vehicle for making a political statement, while marking a permanently visible commitment to a cause. The border tattoos create is only skin-deep, but that enables a constantly shifting field on which identities are drawn.

Notes

[1]MacGaffey, 172
[2]ibid, 175
[3]ibid, 173
[4]ibid, 176
[5]Appiah, 260
[6]ibid, 260
[7]MacGaffey, 176
[8]Mallon, 145
[9]ibid.
[10]ibid., 146
[11]ibid., 159
[12]ibid., 157
[13]ibid., 149
[14]ibid., 158
[15]Thomas, 125
[16]ibid., 129130
[17]Mallon, 158
[18]Thomas, 102
[19]ibid., 104
[20]ibid., 108
[21]ibid., 103
[22]Te Awekotuku, pp. 85
[23]ibid., 90
[24]ibid., 91
[25]ibid
[26]Schwartz, 225
[27]ibid., 227
[28]ibid., 232
[29]ibid., 228

[30] *GoFundMe*, as of 12 December 2016
[31] Talamo

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Appendix A

Full Course Descriptions

79-346 American Political Humor from Mark Twain to the Daily Show; *Dr. Scott Sandage*—This course takes a cultural approach to U.S. history since the Civil War, as seen by the nation's most astute and influential critics: its political humorists. Besides immortals like Mark Twain and contemporary novelist Don DeLillo, we will (re)discover the satirical yet hilarious voices of H.L. Mencken, Will Rogers, Dorothy Parker, Walt "Pogo" Kelly, Richard Pryor, Fran Lebowitz, and others through essays, novels, recordings and films. Throughout the term, we will collaborate in defining terms and learning a vocabulary we can use to discuss and write analytically about ephemeral, topical critiques that make us laugh in order to make us think. How does "humor" differ from "comedy" or from "jokes"? Beyond lampooning government or elections, what makes humor "political"? What are the relationships between politics and art? What can political humor reveal that we might not "get" by any other means? At its sharpest edges, humor addresses issues of class, gender and race in American life, and provokes alternative thinking about mass culture, consumerism, and conformity. To provide context and analytical resources for these themes, we will also read historical studies and relevant theories by Sigmund Freud, Luigi Pirandello, and Mary Douglas. Assignments include four analytical essays, entries in a collaborative online glossary, a brief oral report, and occasional short quizzes on assigned readings.

79-316 Trajectories in Photography: Prehistory to 1945; *Dr. Leo Hsu*—This course explores how photography influenced and was shaped by social and political changes in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We will investigate photography in its modern and modernist constructions, with special attention to both continuities and ruptures between the premodern and the modern. Specific topics will include: the nature of pictures and precedents in picture-making, from cave paintings through 20th-century experiments in photography; photography's role in the rationalization of geographies and peoples; the promises of photography as a new

technology alongside electricity and the motion picture; the position of photography in relation to fine art; publications, mass media and propaganda; social photography, documentary photography and activist photography; and vernacular photography and photography's popular uses. The course draws from various disciplinary perspectives including art history, anthropology, history, and science and technology studies. The course will include instructor lecture, student presentations, and guest lecturers. Class discussion will be an integral aspect of the class.

79-212 CHINA AND ITS NEIGHBORS: MINORITIES, CONQUERORS, AND TRIBUTE BEARERS; *Dr. Donald Sutton*—This course examines East Asian peoples on the periphery of the Han Chinese and their interrelations from the time of Genghis Khan to the present, including Mongols, Manchus, Koreans, Tibetans, Muslim Turks of Central Asia, and ethnic groups of south China. It is, in part, a history of a civilization seen from its margins. We question the usual narrative of Chinas uncomplicated absorption of its neighbors and conquerors, and pay attention, unconventionally, to voices of minority peoples. Besides ecology, war and diplomacy, we examine cultural conceptions and mutual influences. We also look for the emergence of a sense of identity among peoples in contact, including Han Chinese, especially at the onset of nationalism and industrialization. The course also looks at some Western views of the subcontinents peoples.

79-245 CAPITALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE; *Dr. Scott Sandage*—This small discussion course traces ideas about individualism and capitalism in the U.S., from colonial times to the present. We will focus on three main themes: 1) the relationship between capitalism, work, and identity; 2) changing definitions of success and failure; and 3) the historical origins of contemporary attitudes toward 1 & 2. In short, we will study the economics and emotions of the American dream: how class, race, gender, occupation, and ambition shape our identities. Readings include "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin," studies by Alexis de Tocqueville and Max Weber, writings of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, and Henry Thoreau, Kate Chopin's "The Awakening," Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," and other works. Grading is based upon a readings journal, participation in discussion, three short essays and a longer final paper.

79-262 MODERN CHINA; *Dr. Donald Sutton*—Assuming no prior familiarity with China or its culture, this course examines China's continuous changes from the 1800s on, in its cultural traditions, identities, daily life, social relations, and self-perceptions, engendered by both internal initiatives and external contact. We look at how changes unfolded in mass movements and in individual lives, in statecraft thought and in societal practices. We examine the roles of such historical actors as the extended family, modern reformers, the state, the parties and ethnic groups. Participants learn to

use primary sources in making historical observation and to critique some analytical approaches to modern Chinese history. Since we rely heavily on assigned readings, active class participation is essential in this course.

79-375 China's Environmental Crisis; *Dr. Donald Sutton*—In the context of China's changing ecology, this course explores whether and how sustainable development has been, is being, and might be pursued by its vast population and political leadership. Without neglecting culture–e.g., Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Altaic (steppe) views of ideal human/environment interaction–we trace historical demographic patterns and their effects on China's fauna and flora, and investigate past government efforts at water control, migration, new crop introduction, natural disasters, etc. Over half of the course concerns the People's Republic (1949-), paying special attention to birth control policies, the steppe reclamation, the Three Gorges dam, industrial growth, pollution scandals, tourism and environmental policy. We work mostly by discussion, centering on materials read in advance by class members.

79-317 Art, Anthropology, and Empire; *Dr. Paul Eiss*— This seminar will explore the anthropology and history of aesthetic objects, as they travel from places considered "primitive" or "exotic," to others deemed "civilized" or "Western." First, we will consider twentieth-century anthropological attempts to develop ways of appreciating and understanding objects from other cultures, and in the process to reconsider the meaning of such terms as "art" and "aesthetics." Then we will discuss several topics in the history of empire and the "exotic" arts, including: the conquest, colonization and appropriation of indigenous objects; the politics of display and the rise of museums and world fairs; the processes by which locally-produced art objects are transformed into commodities traded in international art markets; the effects of "exotic" art on such aesthetic movements as surrealism, etc.; and the appropriation of indigenous aesthetic styles by "Western" artists. Finally, we will consider attempts by formerly colonized populations to reclaim objects from museums, and to organize new museums, aesthetic styles, and forms of artistic production that challenge imperialism's persistent legacies.

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