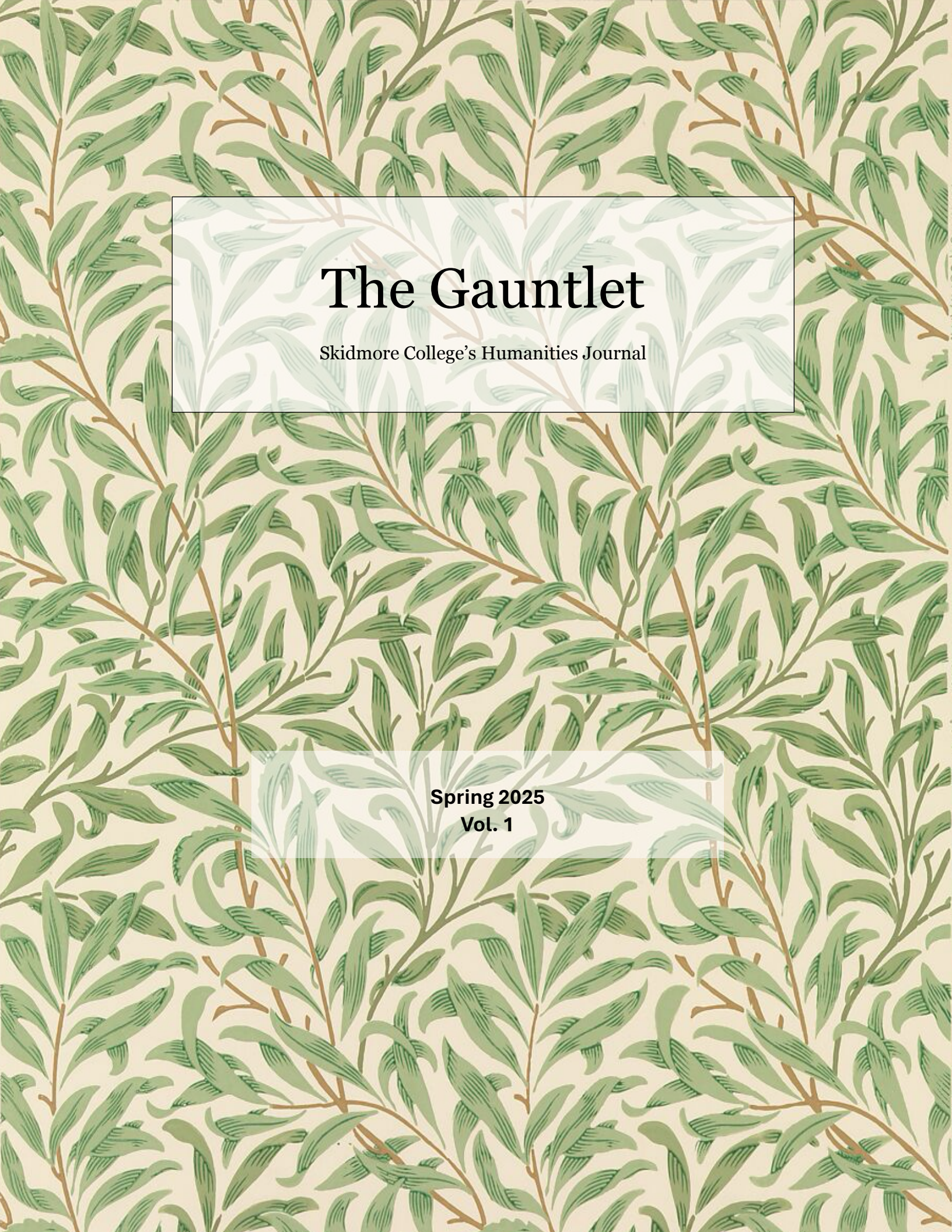




The Gauntlet

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Therapeutic Copying:
Van Gogh in Confinement

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Professor Mimi Hellman
The Lives of Vincent van Gogh
December 19, 2024

Vincent van Gogh (1852-1890) plays a critical role in the art historical canon, embodying and emboldening a tortured artist persona. The Dutch artist, infamous for his lifelong struggle with mental illness, has been construed in pop culture from lunatic to genius. However, his complex personhood negates a single definition; Van Gogh's widely-known struggles cannot explain away prejudices and his positional power. His general dissatisfaction with his middle-class upbringing, along with his childhood being instilled with religiosity, placed him in contact with peasants whom he envied. Van Gogh's voluntary admittance to the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence on May 8, 1889 resulted from a declining mental health, famously acknowledged in the self-mutilation of his ear. His 1890 oil painting *Prisoners Exercising* draws on both his fascination with the working class and his position in asylum. By employing a copyist practice in which Van Gogh reimagined art pieces of different styles and mediums, the artist implements Gustave Doré's 1873 *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* through a derivate gaze, Van Gogh unable to comprehend Newgate's brutality while experiencing a borderline luxury experience in Saint-Rémy. While the prisoners' round motif encourages artistic interrogation of prison systems, Van Gogh's secondary perspective of Newgate Prison inhibits an accurate depiction of oppression.

The Artist as Copyist

An overwhelmingly cool-toned composition, *Prisoners Exercising* interprets the derelict physical and emotional conditions in prisons through the translation of Doré's original engraving. The composition shows a circle of uniformed and individualized prisoners in a high-walled, enclosed courtyard. Placed at an unnatural angle, the viewer takes on an omniscient, divine role, spectating the prison's inhumanity from above. Van Gogh's characteristically thick impasto textures the courtyard architecture, giving movement to the inanimacy and a bestial

quality to the very device keeping the men captive. Three finely dressed men spectate the solemn prisoners, but they too are placed within the viewer's divine jurisdiction. Strikingly, one prisoner with orange hair looks directly to the viewer.

As a copy, this painting serves as a physical amalgamation of Van Gogh's personality, interests, and artistic mentality. This repeated copyist practice reveals Van Gogh's forced anachronistic subject matter during his stay at Saint-Rémy, relying on work by his idols rather than the natural scenes so common in his later body of work. Van Gogh's introduction to Doré's work occurred during the former's stint in England as a schoolteacher and preacher in the 1870s.¹ Here, Van Gogh became exposed to the London art world, including Doré's *London, A Pilgrimage*, an illustrated book of engravings displaying both London's upper class and its underbelly; Doré illustrated the "wealthy at play" alongside thieves, orphans, and the homeless population.² His 1872 monochromatic woodcut engraving *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* pictures the same group of male prisoners as depicted in Van Gogh's painting. With no sign of nature other than glimpses through few barred windows, the prisoners are isolated from the outside world. As argued by Justin Treuherz, this print's social impact comes not from individualized, biographical depictions of the convicts but from the generalized overtones of prison's inhumanity.³ Victorian social realism, rife with commentary on class divides and social equity, encouraged a voyeuristic interest in the lower class, and *London, A Pilgrimage* depicts the social scene Van Gogh entered upon his initial visits.

¹ "Chronology," Van Gogh Letters, accessed November 8, 2024, <https://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/chronology.html#>.

² Martin Bailey, Debora Silverman, and Barbican Art Gallery, *Van Gogh in England: Portrait of the Artist of a Young Man* (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1992), 16.

³ Justin Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art*, (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1992) 66.

The artist demonstrated interest in the working class in a religious context, believing peasants' inherent godliness through inversion.⁴ Paired with his later interest in Doré's work, Van Gogh's lifelong morbid curiosity often encouraged self-placement among their ranks. Doré's London, in Van Gogh's eyes, reflected "terrifying truthfulness"⁵ associated with impoverished sectors of the city. *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* is composed of detailed linework illustrating the bleak habitat forced upon convicted criminals (whether they be arrested for murder or petty theft). Despite their individual depictions, each prisoner's containment homogenizes the group and emphasizes their detained stagnancy. Though Van Gogh painted *Prisoners Exercising* nearly two decades after his exposure to Doré, England and its creatives consistently influenced Van Gogh's *oeuvre*.

The artist's copyist practice became especially prevalent during his stay at Saint-Paul Asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. With his ability to paint from observation impeded, Van Gogh turned to prints of illustrations and paintings sent to him by his brother. Focusing particularly on masters such as Millet and Delacroix,⁶ Van Gogh found this practice to contain the essence of language translation or musical transcription;⁷ reformulating monochromatic engraving prints into thickly impastoed oil paintings required the interpretation of value into hue and saturation. At Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh utilized painting from his major influences as a distraction from the more severely ill patients the asylum surrounded him with.⁸ In Van Gogh's eyes, copying "teaches and above all sometimes consoles,"⁹ providing the artist

⁴ Debora Silverman, "Pilgrim's Progress and Van Gogh's Metier," in *Van Gogh in England: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Martin Bailey (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1992), 97.

⁵ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 162. Brussels, January 1881.

⁶ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 805. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, September 1889.

⁷ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 839. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, January 1890.

⁸ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, May 1889.

⁹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 805.

with small comforts in between his episodes. *Prisoners Exercising* exhibits an extreme concentration on both precision and interpretation. According to Katherine Pilz, Muriel Gelgof, Luc Megens, and Nienke Bakker, Van Gogh very likely utilized gridlines in his planning and sketching processes.¹⁰ Such evidence indicates Van Gogh's emphasis on learning from master composition practices, not just his own stylistic edification. By applying such exacting concentration on proportions and composition, Van Gogh reveals his reliance on masters to rebuild and self-comfort.

Prisoners Exercising takes on life of its own through Van Gogh's copy. His interpretative practice instills the piece with meaning outside of its original English context. Van Gogh utilizes Doré's highly detailed etching to challenge his own artistic ability, as referenced in a letter to Theo.¹¹ His willingness to continually improve upon himself despite his recent and repeated episodes of illness illustrates a desired or necessitated return to the subject matter Van Gogh began his artistic career with: the impoverished and oppressed. The prisoners depicted in the painting at hand, particularly the man looking at the viewer, serve to represent Van Gogh's (voluntary) detainment in Saint-Rémy. In Doré's original, this figure's equivalent does not meet the viewer but follows the line of sight in his path. Rendered with an unmistakable direct gaze at the viewer and bright orange hair in Van Gogh's, one can make the case that this reimagined figure represents Van Gogh's feelings of emotional and physical containment. Through this therapeutic copying, Van Gogh implements his own image to reflect his feelings of social proximity to Doré's prisoners. As argued by Debora Silverman, Van Gogh often likened himself to working class people he depicted in order to authenticate his own position in the class

¹⁰ Pilz, Gelgof, Megens, and Bakker, "Van Gogh's Copies", 131.

¹¹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 854. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, February 1890.
Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 162.

inversion — that being the idea that the earthly impoverished will be rewarded for their struggle in the afterlife.¹² By copying this specific Doré print, Van Gogh functionally aligns himself with both Doré in his artistic exposé and the prisoners in their earthly punishment. Taking this sentiment further by rendering himself within the composition, Van Gogh emulates his earlier artistic practice.¹³

Generally, a copyist practice is a product of modernism, and did not carry artistic significance until the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Though artists had employed masters' works in order to improve upon their skillsets for centuries, mastercopying only gained recognition in the modern period. Van Gogh's newer interpretive style allowed for his copies to be viewed as original artworks, resulting from the artist's popularized temperament and unique stylizations.¹⁵ However, Van Gogh's copyist practice extended only as far as the subject matter. Obsessed with the superiority of painting from observation,¹⁶ rendered difficult due to his confinement in Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh copied out of necessity. Doré, however, was lauded for refusing to sketch scenes from observation, instead opting for etching directly from memory.¹⁷ Both the original *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* and the copied *Prisoners Exercising* are unaligned with Van Gogh's personal processes, but Van Gogh's interest in society's lower echelons, the necessity of painting in Saint-Rémy, and his valuation of English and French artists led him to continually copy masters (Doré, Millet, and Delacroix, to name a few) while in asylum. With the assistance of Theo, Van Gogh gained access to prints by his favorite and most venerated artists. By

¹² Silverman, "Pilgrim," 101.

¹³ Silverman, "Pilgrim," 95.

¹⁴ Roger Benjamin, "Recovering Authors: The Modern Copy, Copy Exhibitions and Matisse," *Art History* 12, no. 2 (June 1989): 180-191.

¹⁵ Benjamin, "Recovering," 183.

¹⁶ David Getsy, "Exalting the Unremarkable: Van Gogh's *Poet's Garden* and Gauguin's Bedroom," in *Van Gogh's Bedrooms*, ed. Gloria Groom (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016): 47.

¹⁷ Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 66.

interpreting works outside of the natural scenes he favored in the last years of his life, Van Gogh employed copying to expand upon and return to his *oeuvre*.

Van Gogh's *Prisoners Exercising* after Doré's *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* illustrates the artist's personal connection to both Doré and the prisoners depicted. Doré's social project *London, A Pilgrimage* sought out London's impoverished sectors and downtrodden population. Its popularity in London influenced Van Gogh's already piqued interest in the lower class, as represented through his early works. This exposure to Doré's work revisited Van Gogh during his stay at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence decades later, and the latter worked with prints in imitative practice. Doré's original composition in conjunction with Van Gogh's copy function to illustrate Van Gogh's personal societal constraints through his mental illness, and to group the artist alongside earthly struggle in containment. Fundamentally, Van Gogh's copy and interpretive practice act self-servingly for the artist in asylum, allowing him to maintain his artistry and edify his social position inversely.

The Artist in Asylum

A part of his copyist practice in asylum, Van Gogh's interpretive translation of Gustave Doré's *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* reflects his disconnection and self-insertion with oppressive confinement. His oil painting, *Prisoners Exercising*, attempts to instill the prison architecture and social space with the same bestiality that Doré observed. However, his privileged experience in Saint-Rémy hinders Van Gogh from truly comprehending the horrors at Newgate. Van Gogh's interpretation, though it incorporates an interesting divergent perspective, is ultimately derivative of Doré's original social commentary. Lacking the institutionalized misery pictured in Doré's engraving, *Prisoners Exercising* reflects Van Gogh's obsession with self-insertion into impoverished sectors of society while not fully grasping his positionality.

Despite the similar historical structures of prisons and asylums, Van Gogh's copy of Doré's *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* disputes the comparison, and Van Gogh manufactures an unequal comparison between prisoners and himself.

In comparative standards, Van Gogh's experience in Saint-Rémy was extremely comfortable. With Theo's assistance, Van Gogh was allotted time outside the asylum and extra space to paint.¹⁸ Healing from his repeated mental health-related episodes, his exposure to more severe mental illness lessened his personal feelings of madness and melancholy.¹⁹ Longing for recovery, Van Gogh feared becoming inundated with madness and entering a vegetative state in which no art could be produced.²⁰ Early in his stay at Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh witnessed a man with acute mania in an extremely agitated state, inducing sympathy from the artist, for he knew he possessed a higher level of stability than the other patient.²¹ Though at this time Van Gogh knew he was unequipped to reenter society, writing to Theo that "[c]oming back to Paris or anywhere at the moment doesn't appeal to [him] at all" and that he "[felt] that [he was] in the right place [in Saint-Rémy],"²² his comparative perspective provided him with hope and a belief in a cure. Through his personal correspondence, Van Gogh reveals general contentment, writing that the "horror of life is already less pronounced, and the melancholy less acute."²³ Though fearful of his condition, Van Gogh maintained an amicable relationship with his doctor, Théophile Peyron, suggesting a lack of authority-driven conflict in Van Gogh's life at this time.²⁴

¹⁸ James C. Harris, "Asylum at Saint-Rémy," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 67, no. 7 (2010): 666.

¹⁹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776.

²⁰ Sander L. Gilman, "The Insane See the Insane: Vincent Van Gogh" in *Disease and Representation: Images from Madness to Aids* (Cornell University Press, 1988), 122.

²¹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776.

²² Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 798. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, September 1889.

Safe in Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh used his privileged stay to produce some of his most well-known art to date.

During this time, Van Gogh also produced numerous copies of prints, including that of Doré's *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard*, contemporarily retitled under Van Gogh's name to *Prisoners Exercising*. Van Gogh's copy features a self-insertion that deviates from Doré's original. In redesigning the composition in this way, Van Gogh compares his voluntary removal from society to those forced into inhumane conditions at Newgate Prison. While Van Gogh writes of the extreme natural beauty he is surrounded with ("the landscape of St-Rémy is very beautiful, and little by little I'm probably going to make trips into it"²⁵) and the hope he feels for his future, his implementation of hue and line in *Prisoners Exercising* implies a dingy, desolate environment. This choice reflects his desire to position himself within the working class to establish his artistry as an extension of lower-class oppression. Contradictory between his visual art and letters, Van Gogh positions himself simultaneously as comparable to prisoners under Britain's oppressive penal system and a direct beneficiary of France's asylum reforms.

Van Gogh and Doré's separate pieces share four primary visual elements: the body of the prison, the prisoners, the guards, and the multiplicity of lines. Each of these elements mutually bolster the others, particularly in the linework and architecture. In Doré's composition, uniform lines create a sensation of movement and vibration throughout the piece. While prisoners circle around the center, each individual brick bears down upon them. With tightly printed, thin lines all pointing to the circle, the compositional medium highlights the moral and emotional weight of the scene. Standing in conjunction with the rest of the illustrated book *London, A Pilgrimage*,

²⁵ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776.

Newgate Prison Exercise Yard exemplifies the downtrodden conditions experienced in Newgate Prison. Van Gogh's composition, while mimicking the original, interprets the composition in the implementation of color and wider lines. This piece pictures the body of the prison in mammalian form; as opposed to the condensed, oppressive linework of Doré's piece, Van Gogh's imbues the bricks and shadows with organic life. The autonomy afforded to the architecture detracts from the moral responsibility of the prison guards, instead indicating the prison itself for its history of abuse. This integral divergence in composition emerges from Doré and Van Gogh's experiences with confinement; while Doré witnessed these prisoners in the flesh, Van Gogh could only base his piece on what he could gleam from *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* along with his contemporary stay at Saint-Rémy.

The Newgate visualized by Doré maintained the prison's infamous reputation for unlivable conditions and inhumane practices.²⁶ Bearing centuries of notoriety, Newgate Prison, renowned for its cruelty, formed Doré's engraving inherently as a social commentary. Doré, interested in London's "bizarre,"²⁷ depicted Newgate shortly after the implementation of the 1865 Prison Act. This legal stipulation enforced national uniformity amongst prisons, enforcing labor to the point of overexertion and physical harm to convicts.²⁸ Doré's engraving indicates the conditions forced upon convicts through perspectival lighting enveloping the circling prisoners in shadows. Dapperly dressed guards observe the men's solemnity, unfeeling towards the prison's goal to "break the spirit."²⁹ Doré's direct observation of the scene afforded him a glance into the horrors of Newgate, inhabited by prisoners who were oftentimes entirely reliant on

²⁶ Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 66.

²⁷ Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 65.

²⁸ Philip Priestley, *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography 1830-1914*, (Methuen, 1985), 310.

²⁹ Priestley, *Victorian Prison*, 307.

familial money just to survive. In its original context, *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* was printed without a moral lesson or commentary on prison structures;³⁰ rather, the illustration intends to speak for itself in the blatant inhumanity pictured by prisoners meandering mindless circles.

In Van Gogh's attempt to translate this engraving print to oil on canvas, he appears unable to contextualize the given space while at Saint-Rémy. Given extra studio space, time to paint, and supplemented by Theo's pockets, Van Gogh could not possibly bring to light the plight of Newgate's prisoners after the 1865 penal retrogression; in fact, one of Van Gogh's only encounters with true confinement is his barred window.³¹ This experiential blindness is reflected heavily in *Prisoners Exercising*, shadowing the prison guards as though their presence did not directly influence the convict experience at Newgate. Visually attempting to emulate Doré's engraved lines with oil paint, Van Gogh reveals his unfamiliarity with true penal oppression. His diminishing the visual impact of the prison guards while simultaneously shedding added light upon the prisoners indicates Van Gogh's misunderstanding of the prisoners' plight; Van Gogh implies that their misery comes from the cold, bestial architecture, while Doré contends that the guards' constant surveillance and class-driven cruelty formulates the Newgate experience. Van Gogh's use of color, line, and shadow supplants the human guards' moral responsibility in favor of the living building.

Despite Van Gogh's repeated demonstrated interest in joining the lower class spiritually,³² his attempts at visualizing true oppression and struggle reveal his positionality in overarching society. Middle-class and heavily supported by his brother, Van Gogh entered asylum only focusing on healing and art production. Meanwhile, the prisoners depicted in his copy often were

³⁰ Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 66.

³¹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Letter 776.

³² Silverman, "Pilgrim's Progress," 97.

placed in Newgate for petty theft or other crime of necessity.³³ Their socioeconomic positions, though fetishized, could never be truly understood by Van Gogh; his pointed lack of struggle outside of his mental illness inhibited the artist from ever joining the working class despite his decades-long desires. Those depicted in Newgate represent the very base of society, and Van Gogh stripping moral responsibility from the prison guards betrays his self-identification and valuation of the impoverished. The prison, contextualized as an extension of Saint-Rémy, becomes animated at Van Gogh's hand, enacting cruelty upon the prisoners and removing the prison guards' involvement. His inherent oversight of the true oppressive perpetrators through visuality ultimately positions Van Gogh in his comfortable, cushy asylum stay.

Although Doré's *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard* and Van Gogh's *Prisoners Exercising* share inherently similar qualities and compositions, their mediums communicate essentially diverging messaging; Doré has witnessed the inhumanity at Newgate, while Van Gogh wishes he could relate to the prisoners. Both artists demonstrate interest in linework, but Van Gogh's wavering, thick impasto suggests organicism rather than oppression. His disinterest in the prison guards further displays his relative perspective, only knowing the London he had visited decades prior and the privilege he experiences at Saint-Rémy. Ultimately, Van Gogh communicates a blatant ignorance to penal abuse in oppressive confinement.

Figures:

³³ Treuherz, *Hard Times*, 66.

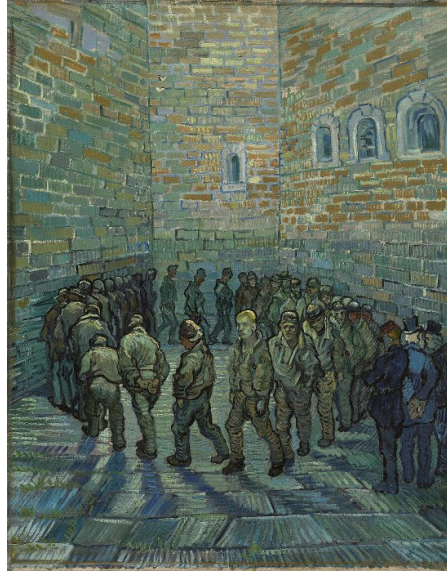


Figure 1: *Prisoners Exercising*, Vincent van Gogh, 1890, oil on canvas, 80x64 cm, Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

High resolution image:

https://collection.pushkinmuseum.art/entity/OBJECT/78772?fund=13&author_find=829&index=3.

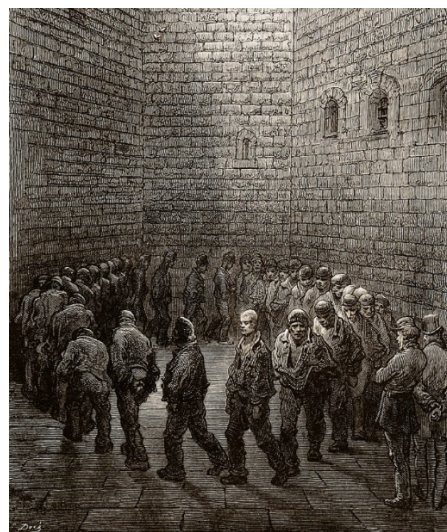


Figure 2: *Newgate Prison Exercise Yard*, Gustave Doré, 1872, wood engraving, 23.8x19 cm, British Museum, London.

High resolution image:

<https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/orbis:584205>

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Van Gogh, Vincent. To Theo van Gogh. Letter 854. Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. February 1890.

Three Tales of Two Wests:

The great men's quest to rationalize the American West

Graham Beers

Professor Eric Morser

American West

16 December 2024

The story of the “Wild West” is meant to be a foregone conclusion. A rugged man will encounter tribulations, injustice, and lawlessness, then he will rescue a damsel and ride into the sunset. That’s it, the dice are loaded from the start. Yet off the page of the dime novel and the picture of the silver screen, the American West reveals a much thornier, richer story. In spite of that story’s stubbornness, many of the influential “leading men” in the historiography of the *Global West* – that is “*Western civilization*” – have sought to break the American West down and definitively contextualize it within world history, bringing their own greatly varying personal and ideological baggage to the region’s constitutive complexity, painful legacies, and skewed surviving record. Yet, despite the internal diversity of historiography in the Global West, cultural self-absorption so deeply permeates the Western historical tradition that precontemporary Euroamerican histories converged on key ideological motifs shared across differences to assimilate the American West into a story that ultimately belongs to the Global West.

This narrow and exclusive trend in the historiography of the American West did not appear from a vacuum. It was intimately related to influential colonialist worldviews, yet it was not a monolithic ideological expression of colonial power, rather, common beliefs and modes of thought were able to independently invent and reinvent intellectual models that constricted, stripped down, and “solved” the messy American West in a way that ignored contradictory or challenging complexity. Alarming, many of the rationalizing elements and structures of these arguments remain cherished by certain historians and intellectuals today, from stadial/dialectic models of historical development to progress-focused materialism and even features of social history. Using the intellectually robust and influential examples of Thomas Jefferson, Karl Marx, and Frederick Jackson Turner, we can see that both the primitive biases and the intellectual lenses of thinkers in the Global West contributed to the mythologization of the American West.

Thomas Jefferson was a Virginia planter who rose to prominence in American politics through his skills of legal, political, and diplomatic insight. His only full book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, was written in the mid 1780s, and the bulk of his accomplishments, namely primary authorship of the Declaration of Independence, the third US presidency, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Corps of Discovery, among others, occurred between then and 1809. During his active career, the US went from being a disunited collection of North American colonies to the first modern democratic republic, but his context was still parochial and geopolitically peripheral.

Karl Marx was a Prussian-born journalist, philosopher, and political economist who systematized Communist ideology according to his interpretation of the scientific approach to socialism and political economy. Between 1848 and his death in 1888, he published many commentary articles with publications in Europe and America, as well as several titanic theoretical tracts, most of which were written in exile in the United Kingdom. At the time of his active treatment of American affairs, the American West was under US territorial control, but mostly sparsely populated and overshadowed in international headlines by ongoing struggles over slavery. Marx's analyses of American affairs were structured within his conceptions of Marxian political economy and historical materialism as they applied to the mid-1800s.

Frederick Jackson Turner was a Wisconsin-born historian specializing in the American West and frontier history. He is best known for his Frontier Thesis, first elaborated in full at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, in which he contended that the history of the United States was driven by its frontier, and White settlement thereof. He went on to foster a generation of historians of his own school of thought. During his active period, between receiving his PhD in 1890 and his retirement in 1922, the United States became the world's largest economy, and the United States Census bureau declared the American frontier to be effectively closed.

The lives of these three men, spanning 189 years, allowed them to see the West from radically different perspectives. They approached history with distinct explanatory devices including civilizations, class conflicts, and moral influences, yet they all grounded their reasoning in observation of the material world and rationalist analysis. They also agreed on five key points: (1) Indians had no large-scale social agency, (2) societies in the West had definable degrees of social development, (3) freeholding farmers were uniquely unburdened within the political economy of their society, (4) the Western physical environment promoted resistance to urban control, and (5) settler colonialism improved the welfare of all American workers.

The formation of the American West as a cultural region began long before the arrival of Europeans to the area, but American historiography's seminal authors – inside and outside of the academy – chronically neglected to acknowledge Indigenous enrichment of the Western cultural space. Elements of pre-columbian cultural placemaking remain throughout the region in many forms. Unfortunately, until contemporary times, the dominant view on Indian affairs in the US government and electorate was that Indians were an obstacle to historical development, one that would be removed in order to invite an original introduction of civilization and culture. Emblematic of this view is Andrew Jackson, the most decisive figure in the nation's history of Indian affairs, who reflected in his farewell address that "The States which had so long been retarded in their improvement by the Indian tribes residing in the midst of them are at length relieved from the evil; and this unhappy race ... may well ... share in the blessings of civilization

and be saved.”¹ In essence, to Euroamericans and Europeans, Indians were obstacles to the real motion of history, but progress would remove them, whether culturally or biologically.

Jackson’s particular policies of executive strong-arming of tribes and armed removal were highly controversial, but the basic assumptions that underlay them were nearly ubiquitous to the elites of the Global West until well into the twentieth century. These assumptions have subsequently been questioned, and modern analyses have problematized the formerly secure assumptions that Indian ways of life should be erased, and indeed that such a removal of Indians from the heritage of American culture even can be accomplished. Earlier, many analysts applied limited humanizing evaluations to Indians, for instance Jefferson and Marx (and presumably also Turner) believed that Indians were intellectually, if not culturally, capable of the same progress as Whites. Significantly, Turner acknowledged – albeit passingly – that “all the more important expeditions were greatly indebted to the earliest pathmakers, the Indian guides, the traders and trappers, and the French voyageurs.”² Nevertheless, the assumption that Native history can be relegated out of the story of the American West other than serving as an antithetical foil to White civilization is broadly reflected in European and Euroamerican explanations of how the character of the West emerged. The logical conclusion of this dichotomy of Indians versus civilization is that out West, the operative forces of civilizational development which White theorists wrote into their histories could not apply in the same way without the intervention of White people.

¹ Andrew Jackson, “Farewell Address” (1837) In *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy* ed. Joseph Blau (The Liberal Arts Press, 1954), 2.

² Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) In *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Other Essays* ed. John Mack Faragher (Yale University Press, 1994), 42.

Turner attributed the unique development of both the US and the American West to the existence of a “free land” and its “continuous recession,” and in framing the process of settler expansion as such, Turner simultaneously lays out a universally applicable principle – that societies are defined by geographic factors – and overlooks the existence of scores of Native peoples to whom his ostensibly universal developmental path apparently didn’t apply. After all, pre-columbian Indian culture is wholly unlike White American culture. Perhaps then the crucial recipe for the modern American is not the environment alone, but a contingent, lived process of occupying “free land” and the synthesis this process yields on what Turner calls European or Germanic “germs”, by which he means Germanic racial populations.

This racially-colored, less universal paradigm of societal evolution is more closely reflective of Turner’s thesis, but it lacks explanatory depth. If a Germanic germ man in the Western physical environment “must accept the conditions which it furnishes or perish,” and he adopts “the hunting shirt and the moccasin,” and begins “planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick,” then he has neither distinction of physical culture nor means of subsistence to set him apart from Indians until “little by little he transforms the wilderness”.³ Apparently, Mr. Germ has simply returned temporarily to a state of nature enforced by the untransformed wild, later dragging Indians into his own material culture by imposing progress on the environment, but Turner seems to miss the fact that neither the environments inhabited by Indians nor the cultures they exercised were primeval blank slates. For millennia, Indians were developing extensive forestry and land exploitation practices that shaped the exact “open land” that temporarily

³ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier”, 33.

conquers Mr. Germ, so then if he is remade by his environment into an American it is as much the Indian as the land that transformed him, and the Indian germ that made it so.

Of course, this implication of his paradigm does not occur to him. Turner was sadly comfortable being constrained by politically expedient stereotypes of his time, which thanks to him have become an integral component of the American West's self-image, from rugged individualism⁴ to martial patriotism⁵ to the image of the Westerner as the "true American."

That said, Turner's particular context and potential motivations are not the only possible explanation for these reductions, as similar simplifications and misrepresentations stem from entirely contrary perspectives as well. For instance, the first footnote in Marx's final chapter of *Capital* reads as follows, "We treat here of real colonies, virgin soils [sic], colonized by free immigrants. The United States are, speaking economically, still only a colony of Europe." That in his analysis, Marx is equally dismissive of Indigenous peoples' habitation of their lands as Turner was should come as little surprise. The (lower) mode of production which Marx would ascribe to the Indians of North America is "primitive" communism, a mode in which individual humans have little agency in social transformation. In the succession of stages of social development, such societies were characterized as free and simple, but also inert until they established a class dialectic, which was necessary for progressive resolution of contradictions.

Marx, Jefferson, and Turner, among many other social theorists in the modernist tradition, shared the concept of a generalizable civilizational path consisting of ordered levels of

⁴ Mody C. Boatright, "The Myth of Frontier Individualism." In *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* ed. Richard Hofstadter (Basic Books, 1968), 43.

⁵ "It is evident that the unifying tendencies of the Revolutionary period were facilitated by the previous cooperation in the regulation of the frontier. In this connection may be mentioned the importance of the frontier, from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman." Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", 41-42.

development. In Turner's case, despite his faith in the critical role of "germ theory [read racial essentialism]", his particular and preferential application of principles of historical progress to Euroamerican settlers can not be construed as rejection of a universal system of societal progress altogether. He sees in the American project not just an individual story of a culturally unique society, but also an exemplar of general processes by which a people attains sequentially more advanced states of societal maturation. According to him, "The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read from west to east we find the record of social evolution."⁶ In other applications, this idea of a universal path to higher civilization has powerfully influenced colonial ideology in both the US and abroad, (e.g. Edmund Burke, Woodrow Wilson) implicitly dominated social science terminology (e.g. stone, bronze, iron, preliterate, historical, steam ages etc.) and influenced formidable theorists of human history (e.g. Hegel, Mackinder, Hobbes). Clearly this idea is not exclusive to treatment of the American West, but due to its role in Indian Removal, it becomes especially sinister when applied in this context.

Marx and his associates introduced one of the most influential theories of stages of social development to ever be proposed, with five major stages described explicitly. In order these are primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. This list of stages was not, however, presented as exhaustive, and both Marx and Engels stressed their complexity. To understand this aspect of the Marxist worldview one must see with the framework in which they structured it. Firstly, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."⁷ Secondly, culture, moral systems, and the state all develop "for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the

⁶ Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", 38.

⁷ Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*, edited by Jeffrey C. Isaac (Yale University Press, 2012), 74.

given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage-labour)”⁸ In other words, all external social structures conform to and reinforce the class structure, itself an outgrowth of the economic system informed by historical developments within the conditions of the physical world, known as the dominant mode of production. So, like Turner, while Marxist historical materialism interprets many societies as active and changing, the hallmarks of a society, such as politics and culture, can only be structured within the terms of the material world and physical laws.

In the particularly Western context, the implications of Marx’s version of the theory of stages are highly unfavorable to Indians who seek to preserve their culture. Marx was certain of the imminent total globalization of the capitalist mode of production, and that “Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone [a class only created by integration into capitalist society] is a really revolutionary [and therefore socially transformative] class.” As such, Indians certainly could, by virtue of being able bodied human beings, engage in social transformation, but only contingent on their oppression as Indians being inevitably rendered redundant by a successful erasure of their economic way of life and its replacement by a condition of exploitation resembling that of a White worker. No wonder then that subsequent socialist leaders and states were so enamored with the fantastical, exoticizing tropes of Manifest Destiny fiction (Stalin’s politburo loved cowboys and Indians movies, East Germany was home to a tacky, fictionalized pop culture motif of Indian obsession etc.) To them, the Indian way of life was as different as society could possibly be, and poetically, world-historically doomed.

Jefferson’s more anachronistic opinions about the alleged social underdevelopment of Indian peoples, and their potential for elevation, largely manifests in his opinions about specific

⁸ Friedrich Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (1878)

cultural practices, particularly farming. To him, “those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”⁹ This enthusiastic endorsement of farming as the highest form of self-sustenance had reaching implications for his views of Indian Affairs. Although Jefferson did not advocate endless industrial expansion like some other theorists of social stages,¹⁰ he did promote forced assimilation and farming for American Indians.¹¹

All three of this essay’s subjects identified the same social manifestation of the Western environment which formed the backbone of Jefferson’s ideological dreams, a robust, socially independent class of family freeholders. To Jefferson, this was a crucial blessing to the republican form of government he sought to establish, as America was alone among White enlightened nations in having access to a surplus of resource-rich and fertile land that would furnish the properties of an upright citizen. In his *Notes on Virginia*, he laid out this conviction.

In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity, not of choice ... Dependence begets subservience ... generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts ... It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic ... degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart.¹²

Clearly then this healthy and politically wholesome class of citizens allegedly found in America was a special result of lands that were neither “cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator.” At

⁹ Thomas Jefferson, “Manufactures.” In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (UNC Press, 1982), 165.

¹⁰ “While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench” *Notes on VA*

¹¹ “Jefferson refused to grant a primitive people sovereignty over land they did not cultivate... The mode of Indian land occupation demanded a formal system of liquidation” Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian*. (UNC Press, 2013), 168.

¹² Thomas Jefferson, “Manufactures.” In *Notes on Virginia*, 164-165

the time of his writing the land that fit this bill was not a matter for guesswork. In the 1780s cheaply accessible farmland lay to the West. Furthermore, with the rapidly expanding population of the nation, Jefferson could never be certain that unplowed lands in the Northwest Territory and the Old Southwest would long sustain his chosen people against urbanization. This made Westward expansion a necessary subordinate task to the more ultimate objective of fostering a republican citizenry and a virtuous nation. Jefferson's monumental testament to this political and moral imperative was his purchase of Louisiana territory in 1803. If Jefferson's implicit environmental determinism did nothing else but minutely encourage the American side to commit to that treaty, by virtue of the world significance of that choice, Jefferson's ideology of geography, even if incorrect, would still occupy an elevated place in the making of the West.

Despite the vast ideological gulf between Jefferson and Marx, they are more or less in agreement about the social independence of the American freeholder. To Marx everything in the modern world comes back to capitalism, a system which, according to his definition, operates as a form of subjugation of laborers enabled by the exchange of "commodities" (which can mostly refer to any goods or services) and secured by the alienation of the laborer from his means of production. In the same sense that to Jefferson, "Dependance [sic] begets subservience," to Marx the dependent worker is subject to the same exploitation in underlying economic terms as a chattel slave, and indeed the "transformation of slaves and serfs into wage laborers" is "a mere change of form."¹³ Like Jefferson, Marx identifies Europe as a playground of capitalist dominion over workers, but "in the colonies ... the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labor, employs that labour

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1867), 927.

to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist.”¹⁴ Coming from Marx, this is the most freedom a toiling person can have within the dominant mode of capitalism, and Marx himself never polemicized against this class of people, making them uniquely unoppressed and guiltless.

Marx’s scorn, like that of Jefferson, rests more than anywhere else on the urban commercial/industrial owning class, a group which they and Turner stressed as a natural polar opposite class to the people of the West. Thomas Jefferson, in tension with his typically laissez-faire and Lockian economic ideology, was profoundly skeptical of the political and moral motivations of urban elites. This distrust reached its fever pitch during the controversy over federal debt assumption in 1790, during which time he accused his own political colleagues of shirking their responsibilities to the nation and its people because of a desire to appreciate the value of their own assets in securitized state debt.¹⁵ The implications of these aspersions against “money jobbers” and “paper men” in Congress were deep, as Jefferson notably also believed that the overall moral character of a man was influenced by his means of self-support.¹⁶ This crisis especially typifies Jefferson’s attitudes about the resistance of Western and rural people to the corruption of city-dwelling authorities, because the Funding Act of 1790 was geographically polarized, but not only between the North and South as some often suggest. The “Charleston Federalists” of South Carolina were some of the bill’s strongest proponents, and Maryland was split. One of the decisive points of contention over the bill was that congressmen did not want to betray their rural populations by approving Assumption at the expense of their tax burden.

¹⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 931.

¹⁵ Beard, Charles A. “Some Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy.” *The American Historical Review* (1914).

¹⁶ Krall, Lisi. “Thomas Jefferson’s Agrarian Vision and the Changing Nature of Property.” *Journal of Economic Issues* 36, no. 1 (2002).

The narrative of Western skepticism toward the decisions of authorities centered in cities and in the East continues with Turner. He asserts that “From the conditions of frontier life came ... coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness, that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients ... that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism ... these are traits of the frontier,” and that these traits came to define “the democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism, intolerant of administrative experience and education, and pressing individual liberty beyond its proper bounds.” Turner’s contention is not that this cultural consequence of the frontier is a strictly positive thing, indeed he actually cites “a laxity in regard to governmental affairs” as enabling “the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, his explanation for this national scourge is a regional spirit of self-representation and resistance.

The nation-wide reach of the American West was felt profoundly throughout American history by people in the East, even those who had never left the seaboard. This fact is recognized in many forms by our three subjects, but one of the most controversial matters that they address, whether implicitly or explicitly, is the labor-safety-valve theory. The doctrine itself is Turner’s, and its critics and proponents tend to lay the blame or glory of its “discovery” with him. In social terms, he was its most explicit author, but stated in macroeconomic terms the doctrine is actually very unimpressive and uncontroversial.¹⁸ Labor exodus to the West reduced the East’s supply of workers and thus raised the market price of wages. Though Jefferson and Marx both predated the theory’s modern elaboration, they both expressed views that amounted to an embryonic

¹⁷ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”, 55.

¹⁸ George G. S. Murphy and Arnold Zellner, “Sequential Growth, The Labor-Safety-Valve Doctrine, and the Development of American Unionism.” In *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* (Basic Books, 1968), 190.

conception of the doctrine, as in Jefferson's case, or as in Marx's case an actual understanding of the economic forces that are expressed in the economic principles behind the theory.

Jefferson's view of manufacturing was, as we have already discussed, less favorable than his opinion on farming. In *Notes on Virginia* he addresses the matter of the states' trade balance, which at the time was heavily dependent on export of agricultural goods and extracted commodity resources. During this discussion he concludes that the best result for the nation would be continued importation of finished and manufactured goods in exchange for the products of farm labor. "While we have land to labour then ... for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe."¹⁹ Of course, ideally Jefferson envisioned the American economy as composed chiefly of planters and freeholders living off of lands tilled by enslaved workers, farmhands, and farmers, within which structure the free selling and hiring of wage labor would be minimized. Yet clearly Jefferson's statement betrays an understanding of two key observations necessary to construct the labor-safety-valve theory. First is the simple observation that plentiful land makes it efficient and beneficial for a nation to consume manufactured goods through import, a position that would be vindicated by the theory of competitive advantage just a few decades later. Second, and more impressive, is the implication that underemployment of lands enables full employment of laboring people in industries that are preferable to them, which offers the masses greater choice in their means of income. In economics, where one's market power is expressed by having more good options and denying alternatives to others, options for laborers entail better available conditions.

¹⁹ Thomas Jefferson, "Manufactures." In *Notes on Virginia*, 165.

Typical of Marx's pessimism about the hospitality of capitalism for the working people of the world is that one of his clearest invocations of the dynamic of the labor-safety-valve revolves around the claim that it has ceased to work. On top of his previously addressed criticism of capitalism by showing that propertyless immigrants can not be compelled into wage labor when they can alternatively access "virgin soils," he later states that because of "the squandering of a huge part of the public land on speculative companies for the exploitation of railways, mines, &c ... The great republic has, therefore, ceased to be the promised land for emigrant labourers."²⁰ It follows logically that if the wastage of Western lands is the direct cause of nation-wide worsening worker conditions, which in Marx's language mainly refer to their share of the value of the products of their labor (in other words the size of their wage), then their availability would alleviate the capacity for the rapacity of capital to extract more surplus-value from workers. It's a restatement of the doctrine, albeit not in the same language.

The story of the American West is, as we have seen, exceptionally complicated in its making. It owes its complexity to the quantity, diversity, and sophistication of people and factors that have made important contributions to its unfolding, first as lived events and then as memory. The place that it occupies in world history is a field of contest to this day, with profound implications on Indigenous history and rights, the meaning of manhood, the role of government, farmers' place in society, and what makes a true American. These issues carry ramifications into both the collective culture and everyday lives of millions of Americans. The power held by intellectual and cultural leaders today remains a weighty responsibility, and understanding the implications and making of intellectual ideologies addressing the American West is crucial for

²⁰ Marx, *Capital*, 940.

modern scholarship to reflect upon its own methods and objectives. Through this lens, a critical comparison of our three intellectuals' approaches to contextualizing the American West within the broader story of the Global West illustrates an apparently uncontroversial bedrock of interpretations that various enlightenment thinkers accepted from the eighteenth into the twentieth century. Though all five of these interpretations have later been subjected to credible criticism and rebuke, within the cultural and historical milieus that produced these writers apparently such criticisms were either unconvincing or not even conceivable. The endurance of their thought and the robustness of their work is a testament to the limits that respected intellectuals must be aware of up to this day.

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The Harried Host and the Beguiled Guest:
Medieval Guesting Laws in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

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EN 229: Sex and Power in the Middle Ages
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In a world before the internet, Airbnb, and even hotels, the basics of travel were much more complicated and at times even treacherous. In the Middle Ages, therefore, travelers and hosts alike adhered to guesting laws which could make a traveler's harrowing journey a bit more certain. After surviving the tribulations of the road, though, navigating these guesting laws could be even more tiresome. Despite the deeply Christian culture of Europe at the time, Medieval Europe was exceptionally good at cherry picking which aspects of scripture they wished to follow, and how closely. Case in point: the Bible clearly emphasizes the evils of wealth, and yet, the feudal structure of the Middle Ages is predicated entirely on a distinct class divide in which the wealthy nobility controlled all. Similarly, the ideals of hospitality display this double standard, as religious ideals warred with the prospect of personal gain. The hospitality arena provided a setting in which people could not only display chivalry but could also bend and perhaps break it; one's status in society depended on how well you played the hospitality game. The fine line between hospitality and chivalry is distinctly portrayed in medieval romance literature, especially within Arthurian tales. Characters such as Sir Gawain struggle with this etiquette minefield, and despite his best efforts he does not always win, thereby proving the impossibility of combining chivalric ideals with proper hospitality.

While hospitality laws have roots as old as Ancient Greece and beyond, the expectations of hospitality in Medieval Europe predominantly comes from Church teachings. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes this, with verses ranging from the Old Testament: "share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter" (Isaiah 58:7) to the New Testament: "I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me" (Matthew 25:43). The peasantry adhered to this core tenant of housing the needy if they were ever asked to open their homes to strangers (although travel was quite limited among the

peasantry, except for merchants or the occasional pilgrimage). When the need to host strangers in the early Middle Ages arose, as Alban Gautier writes in his work on pre-Viking hospitality, “any man on the road [...] would be welcomed and provided shelter” and “the traveller was at least given some refreshment before following on his journey.”¹ As time went on, however, this open-door policy eventually became a luxury of the wealthy; various blights and a myriad of wars created a deep mistrust in the outsider. As Darrin McMahon notes in his article on Medieval travel, “No doubt, a great many contemporary fears...are figments of frenzied imaginations: devils beyond the city gates.”² Much of this fear comes from the limited travel and external threats, making peasants less willing to host strangers. Monasteries and various religious institutions relieved the burden of hospitality from the peasantry by establishing hospitals for the weary traveler. Most surviving guesting laws, therefore, concern the religious figures who had become linked to the construct, and the gentry who operated in a sphere of their own.

When the operation of hospitality enters the upper echelons of society, the religious obligation it entailed falls by the wayside, giving rise to its connection with power and politics. In Julie Kerr’s article on hospitality and honor, she writes that “the act of administering hospitality was laudable and could enhance one’s reputation and standing”.³ It was very important, therefore, who a host would accept as a guest. Denying hospitality was a way of showing contempt, and accepting guests of a higher status was a great honor. The highest (and most beneficial) honor was if one was visited by the King, as the host could use this esteemed

¹ Alban Gautier, “Hospitality in pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon England,” (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 24.

² Darrin M. McMahon, “Fear & trembling, strangers & strange lands,” *Dædalus* (Summer 2008), 6.

³ Julie Kerr, “The Open Door: Hospitality and Honour in Twelfth/Early Thirteenth-Century England.” *Wiley, History*, Vol. 87, No. 287, (2002), page 327.

guest as a political bargaining chip. Blatantly acknowledging the power games, though, detracted from the spirit of generosity because good Christians were supposed to offer hospitality out of good will. It was, therefore, “the spirit of the welcome, and not the person received” that was important.⁴ To walk the line of generosity and politics, it became customary for hosts to spend lavishly on feasts and entertainment for their guests, as a means of simultaneously displaying their wealth and generous spirit. It was a fine line to walk, as hosts had to determine what an appropriately expensive feast should be. Over-zealous expenditure could lead to “the ever-present danger of arriving to insufficient victuals”⁵ and would decrease the quality of hospitality expected for the king (or other visitors). Having a reputation for insufficient hospitality could make a host a social pariah; hosting was, therefore, a delicate art with many societal rules and customs at which the nobility needed to excel at to increase their own standing.

The trickiness of navigating these contradictory customs and the social power of host and guest appear throughout Arthurian literature, especially in tales concerning Sir Gawain which navigate the interplay between chivalry and other guesting laws which arise throughout his narratives. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, he must contend with preserving his piety and chastity and refusing a host’s gift, when Lord Bertilak’s wife attempts to seduce him. In Lawrence Warner’s work on sexual hospitality, he writes that “while sex with the lady would in most circumstances be a grave violation [...] it is equally possible that ... any refusal of her offers, no matter how gracious, may be *lodly*, horrible.”⁶ When taking on the role of guest, Sir

⁴ Julie Kerr, “The Open Door,” page 323.

⁵ Levi Roach, “Hosting the king: hospitality and the royal *iter* in tenth-century England.” *Journal of Medieval History*, no. 37, (2011), 37.

⁶ Lawrence Warner, “Mary, Unmindful of Her Knight: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Traditions of Sexual Hospitality.” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Vol 35, (2013), 266.

Gawain automatically enters the guesting contract, whereby he is entirely subservient to his host and must follow the host's every wish. As the poem states, he must "Either take her tendered love or distastefully refuse. / His courtesy concerned him, lest crass he appear."⁷ Refusing the Lady, therefore, is "*lodly*" — a middle English word which Warner translates as akin to viscerally loathsome. Should Gawain accept the Lady's offer, though, he is simultaneously disgracing his host by cuckolding him and disgracing himself by besmirching his chastity, one of the core tenants of chivalry. It would seem there is no way Gawain can escape the situation with his honor intact. The Lady's offers of gifts and sex also refer to the custom of gifting. After Gawain refuses her advances, she offers him a ring to which he replies, "I forego all gifts."⁸ As he does not have anything to give in return, Gawain refuses the gift because he will not be able to provide the obligatory counter gift. This refusal is much more acceptable to the Lady, because it follows pre-ordained hospitality customs while his refusal of her sexual advances undermines the unquestionable power of the host. These various encounters with Lord Bertilak's wife show the nuance of gift giving and the intricate understanding a guest must have of what is and is not acceptable. The guesting laws ultimately challenge Gawain's chivalry, as he must weigh the options of dishonoring his host, unchivalrously refusing the Lady, or breaking chivalric code in an attempt to please his host.

The dissonance between chivalry and hospitality continues into "The Wife of Bath's Tale," in which Gawain attempts to evade hospitality while also attempting to regain his chivalry. The tale begins with Gawain breaking his honor when he rapes a maiden. In his quest to redeem

⁷ Trans. Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl*, Yale University, (2001), L. 1772-1773.

⁸ Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain*, L. 1822.

himself, he must discover what women truly desire and after a futile search, he finds a crone in the woods. She agrees to help him only if he fulfills her next wish.⁹ The crone is fay, and so while she may appear like peasantry, she understands the binding nature of hospitality and knows that Gawain's refusal to fulfill her wish (of marriage), he is breaking custom by denying her the counter gift. Since Gawain's honor is already broken, he must accede to the crone's request to at least fulfill the requirements of hospitality. When he marries the crone, he does so out of a need for social redemption, although it still does not restore his chivalry because he is doing it ungraciously and out of personal necessity. Even his fulfillment of hospitality is somewhat undermined by the crone's speech against wealth. She reminds Gawain of the scripture, saying "High God above, on whom we base our creed, / In willing poverty did live his life" (L. 1178-1179). By condemning wealth, she condemns the nobility's ideal of hospitality and therefore makes Sir Gawain's restoration somewhat worthless, as she had debased the whole structure of hospitality. In this case, not only is Gawain forced to choose chivalry or hospitality, but both are rendered invalid: one on principle and one by his own doing.

Therefore, it is ultimately impossible for Sir Gawain to combine the structure of hospitality and the demands of chivalry without failing in one or the other. The very nature of hospitality — its political and financial implications — is in direct opposition to the piety, chastity, generosity, and even humility required of chivalry. On occasion Sir Gawain can use scripture to determine if he should adhere to chivalry or hospitality, but as the practical religious elements had been removed from hospitality, it is not always possible to use the Bible as a

⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale." Trans. Sheila Fisher, In *The Selected Canterbury Tales: A New Verse Translation*, (Norton, 2012) L. 1010-1011.

compass. He must therefore rely on his own sense of morality within these situations. As we see from “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” though, his morality is faulty, making it even more difficult for him to tread the delicate line of proper decorum. Sir Gawain is arguably given this deficiency so that the noble class can justify their lack of chivalry for if even one of the most lauded figures in literature struggles with his principals, others are allowed to falter as well.

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Legitimate Ends:

A Dialogue with Skidmore College Professors

Maxwell D. Plenby

AH371: Independent Study in Art History

Professor Ian Berry

3/17/25

This project is dedicated to my family, who introduced me to the indescribably
wonderful world of art.
And to my dear partner, Rowan, who inspires me, and reminds me of my love for
art every day

Foreword

Hello, my name is Maxwell. I am about to graduate from Skidmore College in May, 2025 as a BA in Political Science, with minors in Sociology and Art History. Before the rest of my project, I would like to give some background first.

Without the interdisciplinarity of Skidmore courses, and how applicable subject matter is from one class to another, this project would not have been possible. During the Spring 2024 semester, I first learned about Berger and Luckmann, and their theory of Social Constructionism. Six months later, their work came up again in an Art History course, in preparation for a class discussion regarding art and artists that exist on the periphery of the Contemporary Art Movement. Upon reading a section from Gary Alan Fine's *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity*, it became evident to me that the terms used for lesser-known artists and their work are contentious, and have been the subject of discourse for some time.

"Folk Art" often evokes ideas of "rural life, community, simplicity, tradition, and authenticity." However, this definition oversimplifies the diversity seen in both the folk artist and folk art pieces. "Self-Taught Art" is also complicated, and difficult to define, as there is no way to adequately determine the point at which an artist becomes 'taught enough' to be considered "taught," or conversely, not taught enough. Finally, "Outsider Art" presents the greatest difficulty. In the opinion of some, being labeled an "outsider" grants artists a platform where visibility and recognition can be more easily awarded to unknown creators. Critics of the term, however, argue it is outright "pejorative . . . marginalizing . . . hegemonic, elitist, and racist." These discourses continue to occur in art spaces today. The "term warfare," surrounding contemporary art, then, is as prevalent as it was in 2004.¹

After my initial fascinations with Social Constructionism, and the categorization of art, I felt it was necessary to examine these topics further. With the end of the Fall 2024 semester nearing, I registered for an independent study. The project, which I originally intended to be a more typical JSTOR-EBSCO research paper, evolved rapidly. Instead of relying on the digital testimonials of academics, art critics, and art administrators—whom I could not sit face-to-face with—I began scheduling interviews with Skidmore professors. During our meetings, we discussed their introductions to art, the conditions that enabled art to remain in their life, and what is on their mind, in terms of the Contemporary Art Movement. With each passing interview, I witnessed the scope of our conversations broadening, and I decided to embrace the uncertainty, rather than forcing discussions into a rigid path. The central themes I identified during interviews were, (1) the importance of family members introducing art at an early age, followed by a community that further encourages involvement in the arts, (2) the benefits and drawbacks of the dramatic increase in accessibility to art as a result of the internet, (3) the intersection of art with capitalism, and relatedly, AI, (4) the mainstreaming and categorization of art, (5) the goals of participants and how they changed over time, and finally, (6) the meaning found in art/academia.

Out of respect for the respondents, who have been so kind to participate in this project, identities will be anonymized. Gender-neutral pronouns are used throughout the paper, in some instances answers will be combined, and thus, citations will read "Respondent(s)."

This project is meant to be read as a transcript of sorts; readers will see the experience of academics, and their opinions on the intricacies of the art world. As a result, there are a lot of quotations used. My aim is to present the information in a way that encourages critical thinking about nuanced subject matter. For a lot of questions, there is no wrong answer, and certainly, there is more than one 'right' answer. In the words of one respondent, "let it be messy."

Opening the Door

I began by asking interviewees, “How were you introduced to art?” or “How did you become interested in art?” With each passing interview, answers began to strike me with resounding familiarity. Each participant cited a family member, or family unit, as the facilitator of their seminal art experience. Listening to participants recount their early interactions with art laid the groundwork for the remainder of our conversation, as well as those that followed. One interviewee stated:

I had the privilege of being raised in an environment where art and culture were valued, and there was the possibility of going to museums and historic houses and things like that. So I think it was instilled in me at a very early age that my ability to process information visually, and my enjoyment of that kind of visual processing, was also a way to learn about the world and to be curious and to experience pleasure.²

Other participants had families that incorporated museums and culture into “daily life,” and during travel too: “Even though we weren’t a very artistic family, or contemporary art or active art-focused family, there was an understanding of going to museums and historic sites and historic homes . . . my parents didn’t get exposed to that kind of thing when they were young, so they tried to intentionally expose us to it as we were growing up.”³

Some interviewees centered their answers on what their families weren’t doing: “It goes way back, you know . . . my interest in drawing wasn’t trampled at age 12, which I think is often what happens with students and children as they get input from the outside, and it dissuades them from drawing. But I kept doing it.” Others had a similar sentiment, expressing that familial support manifested as taking a step back, allowing the children to explore their interests without judgement: “I think a culture of support was really important . . . my parents just being like whatever, do it . . . that personal autonomy, but then having continued external support was always really important for me, and just having that affirmation of . . . yeah, keep going, just keep doing it.” Most saliently, participants’ initial experiences opened the door to new opportunities with art. More specifically, it led to participants being incorporated into that aforementioned “culture of support.” Having this sort of social safety net enabled each interviewee to actualize their eventual careers in art and academia.⁴

A Culture of Support

Following the initial encounters, participants indicated that a key factor led to their continued fascination with art. Much like the manner in which interviewees had been first introduced, there is a recurring explanation to how art maintained a position in their lives; mentors of some sort, or a community space, that emboldened pupils to continue engaging with the visual arts, was responsible. Or perhaps a mixture of both. Instructors may have taken the form of a superlative teacher, whose pedagogical methods stuck with participants far after their time in class together: “I had a really great art teacher who eventually turned into a mentor, who I eventually did a studio assistantship with . . . I think about them even now, decades later.” Other interviewees relied on experienced young-adult counterparts, rather than adult mentors: “I had a friend who was older and knew how to go around galleries, and knew about Artforum Magazine and Interview Magazine.” However, getting involved, and staying involved with art as a young

person, even with support, is often complicated: “In college there were a couple of professors who were really great. My dad, [who worked in the arts], influenced me to some extent, even though he did not support me going to art school, so that was interesting.”⁵

A participant would sometimes approach this prompt—“what was it about art that kept you compelled”—more broadly, electing to discuss their community, as opposed to a particular advisor. Taking art classes in high school, and studying it further in college, helped one interviewee to realize that rather than pursuing a career in an unrelated field, art was “how [they] want[ed] to spend [their] time,” as a means of attaining “intellectual fulfillment and curiosity.”⁶ Others cited a mixture of mentor and community, as the reason why art endured in their lives:

I was trying to figure out who I was going to be. I mean, you know, I didn’t necessarily have words to that at the time as a teenager, but I was certainly trying to be cool and find different friends and see who I was gonna be with. I gravitated towards art and activism, so I was involved in student activist groups and student government. And also, [in] the nearby city . . . I would hang around the independent movie theatre and some record stores, and got to know the local artists through those places. And so by the time I was [an upperclassman] in high school, I was spending most of my out-of-school time hanging [there] . . . I worked at both . . . and those were places where artists came, and so I was involved in . . . what I now realize . . . was honing my own taste . . . In those moments I was practicing not only public speaking, and customer service, but also how to talk about art . . . the kind of art that I liked, and not just defend it, but describe it. And so those two jobs, [at the movie theatre and the record store], were pivotal for connecting me with artists . . . of daily practice merging art and public.⁷

Notably, several interview participants referenced non-visual art as a component of their upbringings as well. Among the list is film, and various forms of dance and musical performance such as theatre, orchestra, ballet, and opera. More peripherally, however, one professor found their local punk community, which became the primary site for their interactions with art. The creation of D.I.Y. art media, like band posters and zines, enables individuals to more adequately integrate into their punk scene. In the case of one participant, they remarked: “I drew album covers and stuff for my friends . . . I had a little merch table and it was just a way to be further involved with people.”⁸

The Democratization of Access

Interview participants had strong convictions regarding how the internet has impacted art consumption, and our understanding of art history, since the time of their youth. I asked some interviewees the question: “How do you think cultural consumption has changed from when you were in high school or college?” Some things I heard were to be expected. However, their answers really intrigued me, and led to later inquiries about the explosion of AI: “[Cultural consumption is] so much more democratic . . . the accessibility of it . . . It’s honestly thanks to the internet, right? . . . A social media presence, a footprint that museums have.”⁹ I asked another participant how the age of the internet has changed the way we interact with art. Their answer was:

Huge! . . . There's two things that your question makes me think about . . . How does the rise of digital interface affect how we know about things? And then how we actually experience art. So if you take the digital part about knowing things, it's an explosion, it's just a huge explosion. So I could have three magazine subscriptions and kind of know what was happening . . . It would be all of the exhibitions [for] . . . this month . . . The art world, for all kinds of reasons, not only digital advances . . . is now much, much bigger [to the point where] no one source . . . no one neighborhood . . . and there's also not one city anymore [that can contain all of the art] . . . So having digital interfaces for connecting with information has just expanded the amount of stuff I know about.¹⁰

Other responses were analogous. Coinciding art's hyper-commodification, some artworks and artists have even gone through a process of "meme-ification," as a result of the age of the internet. According to one respondent, art history has recently proliferated to a very wide audience, which remarkably contrasts what is typical for the area of study: "Art history has a history . . . of being the most ivory tower of the ivory tower disciplines . . . The most inaccessible [with] . . . the most rarified air." The internet has brought about other forms of accessibility as well: "We're in a lovely time in history . . . There is a degree of looking behind the veil of who isn't in art history and why . . . Who's in a museum and who isn't . . . We have been on a nice trajectory of addressing that, looking into that, and understanding that a little better. Moreover, "We see a little bit more objectivity about what art history is . . . people who didn't have the prominence or the social capital at the time they were making work . . . disappear, and hopefully are refound." Finally, the museum space—a site where institutional hierarchies can be critiqued and subsequently dismantled—has slowly progressed, in terms of who it is for, and thus, who has access: "People know that there are museums out there. People, in one sense, feel like those spaces are more for them than they were when I was growing up . . . [It's] the idea of museums as not for some people, or spaces of cultural performance . . . You had to dress up. It was a space of elevation . . . But there's really been such a democratization of access . . . of information." Thus, museum spaces, and the Contemporary Art Movement, have considerably improved from where they once were. However, there is much work left to do; "there is still plenty of critique to level at." Relatedly, the rise of the internet's impact on the art world remains in a duality, as it is a contemporaneously positive and negative force.¹¹

A Skewed Cultural Dialogue

Respondents were critical of large museums and art galleries, stating that: "capitalism and art go hand in hand." The aforementioned institutions, then, are where capitalism becomes most relevant, in terms of the art world. Some argued that, "the system of the gallery is incredibly capitalist," for one. Interviewees added: it's very much based on people who have money selecting what they think is interesting and useful . . . One of the things I'm fascinated by is . . . [collectors] building collections that they then gift to museums; which means that that entire museum's collection is shaped by someone who just had a lot of money." Participants interrogated these concepts further, posing questions such as: "What kind of influence is it for an entire museum to have one person's collection?" "What does it mean to shape everybody?" and "Is it any different than the patronage system of 200 [or] 300 years ago?" Compared to small and regional art institutions, "large museums or even commercial galleries . . . are often driven a little bit more by external validators." Furthermore, museums "are dealing with creating a canon of art

historical record,” which is intertwined with the institution’s economics.¹² I saw this sentiment reinforced across conversations:

As part of this commodification of art, or this democratization of access, you still have a very antiquated vision of what art history is . . . that there is *A* history of art, and to be blunt, that it flows through Western Europe and White America, so that you start in . . . Babylon, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, the Medieval Western World, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Rococo, Modernism. You only have modern art, it only looks the way that it does because of colonization of the rest of the world.¹³

The art market was another site that interviewees were hesitant to let go unchecked. For one, commercial galleries participate in capitalism for reasons that are similar to those of large museums. In other words, they are “trying to keep the heat on in an expensive place.” Others asserted that the sheer amount of art being sold, and the prices at which a selection of that art is selling for, is unprecedented. “Art as a thing to be commodified, to be purchased, to be sold; that’s just exploded . . . We are seeing higher prices than ever before, but for a smaller slice of people.” A major issue of the art market is income disproportion, which respondents took note of as well: “Just because one artist’s work sells for \$10 million, doesn’t mean artists in general are well paid for their production.” Predominantly society’s elites have engaged in art collection as a “mark of social cache,” and although the practice has been present for quite some time, “the numbers that some of these works sell for; it’s a literal inconceivable amount of money . . . The numbers truly don’t feel real.”¹⁴

Academic institutions that teach humanities, like studio art, also face economic pressure to stay in business. One respondent spoke about their experience having gone through art school, stating: “I think because of the way that American capitalist structures are set up . . . all of these institutions now are really relying on following these outside structures; relying on capital to get and to keep these things going . . . like student aid . . . and how funding and money is distributed and whatnot.”¹⁵

Capitalism has somewhat of a stranglehold on contemporary art, as the movement and influence of money is apparent in the aforementioned sectors such as the museum space. As a result, some respondents expressed a disillusionment with museums over time: “Those big museums don’t look as idyllic as they used to in terms of what they’re about, and what the culture is . . . So I look at museums and I think of my early experience with [them] when I was a young person—18, 19, 20—coming into knowing that they wanted to make art.” Furthermore they used to regard museums “as being full of richness and full of this wealth of history [however] . . . where their money comes from . . . just makes them all feel very icky.” Relatedly, art can be understood as “a whole society around names and name recognition,” with gossip playing a role as well. A different respondent continued, suggesting that “we have a skewed cultural dialogue around what art spaces are, who they’re for, and where the legitimacy is.”¹⁶

Despite the complications associated with art institutions, interviewees do not believe these spaces should be abandoned. If anything, they believe the very opposite. I asked one interviewee if art institutions and their practices are inherently paradoxical:

Well, institutions by definition are gatekeepers, aren’t they? An institution has to have a mission. It has a budget. It has a hierarchy of leadership there, and . . . there are all other kinds of parameters about what it can do, where and how, and so on. So it is an inherent

paradox to be a cultural institution of any kind trying to promote the arts and working within your limits. But I think it's worth trying to have inclusive, engaged, unafraid institutional spaces where art can be created and experienced and debated.¹⁷

The Great Fallacy of Art

A respondent told the story of Alice Walton—daughter of Sam Walton, and inheritor of Walmart—and the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. The nexus of capitalism and art, as seen in this testimonial, can be quite nuanced, and not entirely positive or negative:

She is a massive art collector and . . . mostly has focused on collecting American artists in the traditional definition. US American artists, and she got the idea to use her collection to found a museum. My guess would be for tax purposes, but that's [irrelevant]. But something I do want to say complimentary about this project is where she decided to put Crystal Bridges. Walmart is headquartered in Bentonville, Arkansas and that's where she built a museum, and it is a hugely successful museum. When she built it, there was a ton of criticism in the artistic community because giant museums in New York, Chicago and LA were trying to get her to give them her collection and she decided to found her own museum and then they were extra upset that she decided to found it in Arkansas. I remember someone said to me, "people in Arkansas don't go to museums," and my response was, "well, if you build it, they will come." Is it fair to a kid in Bentonville, Arkansas to quote unquote "only be able to access culture" if they can manage to get to New York, Chicago or Los Angeles? Culture exists everywhere. One of the great fallacies of art is that culture only exists in certain spaces. Capital-C culture exists everywhere [and] visual culture exists everywhere. Why should the big coastal cities be the only ones with world class museums? Crystal Bridges is a great museum, and what it has become is a regional hub. So she decided to build that museum in the space that made Walmart; in the community that gave itself to her company . . . They used exclusively local and regional contractors and material and businesses, because it was about rooting it in the region and the community; and this idea that culture does not belong only in certain spaces, and creating access to great works of art. And they've done a good job. They're working on expanding their definition of American art, so . . . they have a huge collection of Latinx material now, and things like that . . . There's critique, but also, you know there's positives and there's negatives to all of this. And I'm very much in support of getting rid of an outdated idea that culture only exists in New York City. I have lived all over the world. Culture exists everywhere, and I actually think it does a detriment to people seeing the value in art if it's only contained in certain spaces.¹⁸

The Seductive of the Digital

Let's take a moment and circle back to the intersection of art and the internet. We have addressed the massive benefits that the age of the internet has afforded the Contemporary Art Movement. However, respondents felt it was necessary to discuss some adverse effects that the internet has had on art. The overabundance of available media, and subsequently, its overconsumption, is a major drawback: "The internet gives us imagery of things limitlessly . . . and while it gives us that, it sometimes makes us feel like there's a substitute for the things, and it

isn't a good substitute." They continued: "I need to remain personally very vigilant that I don't think I've seen a thing because I saw a picture of it on the computer, which is very seductive because so many things are available, and the interface is so much better than it ever was . . . The seductive of the digital is, to me, a negative one . . . it can tease out the laziness in us." However, this issue can be mitigated, to "a small negative, because if you're aware and you're conscious, you can work with it." Others feel that the internet is more of a double-edged sword: "We're both more connected than ever before, yet more siloed at the same time" as a result of internet algorithms.¹⁹

As just previously expressed, interviewees were adamant that experiencing art digitally is nowhere close to as impactful as seeing an artwork in person. However, this can be broadened to in-person experiences: "There's something better and bigger in the physical world, even being in a hallway can be great . . . I really experience the internet as an object that I feel like I keep at an arm's length."²⁰

My next question was: "Are there any other parts of the internet that you see as downsides when interacting with the art world?" Their response suggested that some issues generally understood as direct consequences of the internet, are instead only exacerbated by it:

I don't think the digital actually created any new downsides. I think they've just fueled the downsides that were already there . . . there's just more . . . So, like, the art world can be a very competitive place; it can be a very dismissive place; it can be a very elite place, meaning you only know about it. It's only for those who are in the know. An exhibition can be up in somebody's apartment, and only ten people are invited to see it. And it's super exciting, but it's very elite. It's only for that person and their 10 friends. That's a very special part of the art world, which I like. It can also make the other million people who weren't those ten people feel 'not in.' That feeling existed way before we had computers. Now that we have digital information, we just get to see inside more of those private parties that we didn't get invited to. Or shows or performances or films or talks. And so I think the digital has amped up, at least in my emotions, kind of a: 'I have to be careful not to be overcome with desire to see so many more things and be upset that I didn't.'²¹

Figuring it Out

"Where does AI fit into art? If it does, I asked. "That's a [question] that the artistic community is currently wrestling with."²² Respondents had strong convictions about the recent explosion of AI technologies, and how they have begun to overlap the Contemporary Art Movement. Some are diametrically opposed to the intersecting of art and AI:

I'll probably be one of the loud people who's like, I don't agree with us just galloping towards AI, as the future . . . I am somebody who uses things like grammarly, which is a form of AI, right? Because I do think everyone could use a little bit of help. But when I think about AI becoming the backbone of our structures, it really concerns me because we start losing these other motor skills. When we become so dependent on devices, and feeding our input into something, into this other entity, this machine, this algorithm even, we are losing a really human psychological experience, of curiosity, of even just holding a pencil and understanding the craft of writing . . . And so these charges towards things like

AI and other quote unquote “popular public models,” that are happening[, and] popular ideas of public life, like, what are we losing through that? Are we losing our ability to understand each other, [to] help each other?²³

I heard similar reluctances for AI technologies in the interviews that followed; respondents argued that AI technology is incapable of living up to the physical experience of learning how to do art in different ways manually: “And it was like, oh, wait, my shoulders can do this thing. I can use this different part of my arm in a totally different way. I can draw by using my hips and they play a role, like just having this totally embodied experience, and then having it be more communal too. Understanding the differences in other people's bodies and how we can learn from each other; it is so foundational, and you can't learn that in any type of privatized, individual-centric technology base.”²⁴ Others vocalized their issue with AI's racist tendencies, which programs inherit through the data they source:

AI, like any other tool in human history, has great potentials and great pitfalls . . . The problem is that all of these . . . artificial intelligences, all these algorithmic creation engines, they are built [and] trained by just scraping visual and textual information off the internet . . . If [an AI program] were to scrape the internet for information on [non-white North American] Art, racism is going to rear its ugly head in the content.²⁵

Large corporations use AI as a cost cutting measure, an interviewee noted:

“When art is deployed it's one thing, but [with] everything else, you just have late stage capitalism trying to use it as a workaround . . . trying to copy other people's production and not having to pay them for it.” This workaround, in other words, is plagiarizing content; subsequent to an artist putting their work on the internet, for example, a corporation could use AI to make marketing art, and end up plagiarizing it. The “generous interpretation” of this form of AI injustice, then, is that “the people who deployed it don't even know that they've plagiarized.” However, it is more likely that “they truly don't care about violating copyright; they truly don't see it as a violation, [based on] cultural attitudes about what's valuable and what's not.”²⁶

Other respondents hold beliefs about AI that are more forgiving of the burgeoning technology. I asked a similar question to a different interviewee: “Tell me about the intersection of AI and art. “That's the hysteria of the moment, isn't it?”²⁷ For some, AI feels more like history repeating itself, rather than a novel revolution in technology:

Right now with AI . . . we're having a moment of panic, and I think there was a [similar] moment with photoshop; there were these really famous articles written about how we . . . were gonna develop a stamp and . . . stamp all the photographs that were changed by photoshop, and . . . it's the panic that happens with each new technology . . . How is it gonna change us? What is it gonna do? How are we ever going to be ourselves anymore? . . . If you look at the history of new technologies, they terrify us. And maybe that's why I like working in [art].²⁸

The conversation continued:

The amount of people who have been appropriating images from the internet for so many years . . . This idea that AI is stealing things, I get. But also, people have been stealing things for like 25 years, and nobody seems to have any problem about it . . . Every time there's new technology, or [when] I think about new technology, I want to think about all of the worries that we should have that we don't. Right? So we have worries about AI, but we have no worries about our photographs on the internet; we have no worries about the fact that we share all of our photographs on Instagram . . . We're fine with that. Somehow we've acclimated ourselves to this world, and I think . . . [AI is] a new technology and it's gonna do some things that are amazing and it's gonna do some things that are terrible. And actually, the interesting part is that we're in the moment of figuring that out, and we get to be the ones who figured that out.²⁹

Finally, an interviewee made note of how AI interacts with “the art object,” and with an artist’s creative process:

It’s a fantastic tool for a lot of the things happening around art, the art object. We’ve been talking a lot about how does one know about a thing? So things like transcriptions [and] magazines, AI is gonna have a huge impact on the economics, and also the rigor of communication, which I think is mostly positive . . . I’m sure there are going to be amazing artworks made with AI . . . it’s just another tool in the toolbox . . . I think new technologies often invite artists in to try and tease out the experiments . . . we are certainly gonna see artists using the emerging AI technologies to make interesting things . . . and some of them we will remember and some of them we won’t.³⁰

A Relational Concept

Respondents had lots to say in regard to how art is categorized into “mainstream,” and “not mainstream,” across interviews. First, let’s identify one definition of “mainstream”:

If something is mainstream, I guess that means that there’s a consensus around its value. It’s perhaps reaching a relatively broad audience, so maybe we feel that’s a good thing. But mainstream can also mean normative, excluding everything that doesn’t fit. It can mean commodified. Certainly there’s a lot of commodification in the art world nowadays . . . I think that in the modern period, mainstreaming has an awful lot to do with the market of economics [and] with capitalism, which can be a force for good in some ways, but a harm in others.³¹

Other responses indicate that art’s categorization is subjective, as well as time, person, and site-specific: “Well, that’s a moving target, isn’t it? What is mainstream changes radically over time and from place to place, and even from one group or individual to another. One person’s mainstream might be someone else’s avant garde or margin. And so it’s a relational concept that’s very, very difficult to pin down . . . there are often debates about what is the center [and] what is the margin.”³²

When asked why art becomes mainstream, or conversely, why it remains hidden—or on the periphery of its larger movement—interviewees challenged the premise of the question. They responded with statements like: “I would be careful about operating under the assumption that

mainstreaming is necessarily desirable,” “It isn’t everyone’s goal to be in the canon, right? It’s not everyone’s goal to be institutionalized, and I think that’s great, and as one grows older, you can embrace that,” and “Should that be an expectation? That art reaches the mainstream?” Said another way, art sometimes remains out of the public eye because “it’s not the goal of the artist to have it be seen, or because there is no audience.” Perhaps art is better off if it doesn’t reach the mainstream, as “mainstreaming erodes nuance, and erodes meaning, and erodes history,” according to one interviewee.³³

Participants were steadfast in their conviction that art made outside the mainstream is authentic, and does not require wide recognition to be valid: “There are lots of people who make their art outside of the realm of institutions; it’s yard sculptures and installation things and drawings on scraps and scraps of paper that are around the house, and it’s the way that they process the world, and luckily those things can be discovered, and can be archived, and can let us know how broad the experience of humans can be; here’s how people express themselves in all these different conditions.” Plenty was said about the abundance of social authority that large cultural institutions—like art museums and galleries—wield. Respondents, however, were adamant about challenging the museum space or gallery as the end-all legitimizing site for art; primarily marginalized artists create alternative spaces for engaging with art. The creation of these spaces, where art can be created, viewed, critiqued, or even sold, are essential to any art movement.³⁴ Counterpublics, more broadly, are essential components of navigating “public space,” in certain contexts and for certain people, according to one interviewee:

There are things that have been excluded, and voices, and it's heartbreaking. But also there's something really amazing about artists . . . like women and queer artists, how they make institutions that are outside of capitalism in really f—ing amazing ways . . . you've been excluded so now we're gonna do something weird . . . and maybe we're not gonna [necessarily] make money off of it, but we're gonna find other ways to get involved; and I think that's the true loveliness of art, it's those moments when people who aren't included in the main businesses . . . get to do things.³⁵

Another outstanding concept that respondents and I interacted with during interviews is socialization. More specifically how “people are shaped in ways they don’t even realize.” The interviewee goes on to say: “We can’t escape our own acculturation. We can’t escape the way the cultural matrix has shaped us.” The Contemporary Art Movement, in both its mainstream and its periphery, is related to socialization, as the way in which individuals are socialized determines how we interact with different forms of art. While visiting a world-renowned museum, one respondent took note of an interaction between a young child, and a piece of non-Western ancient art. To the dismay of the respondent, the child reached out and touched the artwork. In their words: “they touched that sculpture because they knew they could. They touched that sculpture because it was framed for them, not as a rarified work of art that you should not [physically] engage with, but as a thing . . . Whereas they’re not going to try to touch the Mona Lisa . . . they’re not going to try to touch the paintings . . . But they’re in a space of non-white art and they’ve been acculturated that that’s an artifact, not art.”³⁶

Circling back to the categorization of art, it is important that we implement multiple critical lenses while analyzing art. Respondents provided an explanation to why individuals tend to categorize things in the first place:

I don't know how useful it is, [to categorize art.] I tend to be more interested in looking at things from multiple points of view and testing out if we use this category [or] . . . that term . . . What's the consequence? What can it help us to see? Can it help us make connections? Can it help us uplift [and] amplify a particular kind of work that . . . hasn't been named or labeled, classified, [or] has perhaps been overlooked? So that might be a good outcome . . . but also as humans, we will always try to mark and label and gather and classify. That seems to be a human impulse. It's a way of making sense of the world. I think if we double down on those labels and categories without thinking about what they include and exclude . . . that's when I think we get into trouble.³⁷

Moving forward, respondents and I also discussed oversimplification that often coincides with mainstreaming: "I think it's naive to just say mainstreaming is bad or the commodification of art is bad. That's not a very productive stance to take. But it has a tendency to oversimplify, and for one, I find the nuances of history quite fascinating . . . I think that people are more than capable of engaging with that nuance and complexity if given half a chance." I then asked the respondent how we may solve the issue of oversimplification: "Education. I think this is why we need art historians, curators, art educators, art critics, as well as, of course, artists, in our society. And we need freedom of expression and funding and institutions that support the arts, and encourage people to be unafraid of unfamiliar, new and different ideas. I think a society can only thrive if that kind of freedom exists."³⁸

Mainstreaming can also, in some instances, be beneficial to the art and artist: "I think there's a desire . . . that work can continue to be experienced.....and in some cases things get destroyed." Institutionalization, whether it is into a museum, collection, or other archival space, can protect an artwork's longevity. Additionally, there are forms of art that have become legitimized by the Contemporary Art Movement. Fiber arts and ceramics, for example, were once seen as craft, and thus invalid as a legitimate art form. However, due to their recent popularization, they are now more "elevated."³⁹

Respondents understand the value of an art piece as having no correlation with if it sits in a particular museum, and rather, look for what is interesting and urgent, situationally. One interviewee, stated:

If art is made within the confines of a luxurious life, it will look different than the art made in the confines of a poverty stricken life. It doesn't necessarily make it good or bad art. There could be fantastic art made with no money, and fantastic art made with hundreds of millions of dollarsThere could be interesting or less interesting art made in all different kinds of contexts. So I think us as viewers, or even as makers, should think about making the best or most interesting or most urgent work we want to make..... Art survives everything. Art survives all economies, you know, art will be there no matter what.⁴⁰

Real Growth

I prompted respondents, some of which are also artists, with questions about their life goals. More specifically, if their achievements had come to pass, and if so, what was next for them. One response was: "I used to want to be represented by a gallery, but I don't think I want that anymore." I chimed in, asking why that changed. "I think that the whole retail art part got to

me . . . but also because it's like a Cinderella Story told to make artists behave." Although it may be an honor to have your art in gallery spaces, in its absence, there is no longer a pressure to create based on what might sell. In other words, artists are able to make work that is "just allowed to be itself." Similarly, artists are also enabled to "drive in the direction of what [their] internal compass is doing," not worried about so many external validators that once influenced their artistic process.⁴¹

Interviewees were interested in ensuring that their professorial and/or artistic practices remained accessible. Operating under a model that is "on the ground," ensures that patrons and students can continue to absorb—if not identify with—their work in a "casual way." Comparably, another respondent shared: "The rarefication of things is bad . . . I don't want my [art] to be rarefied. I don't want my things to go up into a zone that feels untouchable, or weird, or alien to daily human experience." Others saw their primary goal as needing to build onto what they have already started: "I do think about additive things." Moreover, a different respondent stated that "it's more about the work at this point than it is about me, which is different than I felt in the past . . . but that's a real growth for me."⁴²

Cultivating Empathy

The final section of this project will outline why art and teaching are so important to the interviewees. Participation in art culture, for one, is a "deep experience, [through which] you get sensitized to what becomes meaningful [and] how things become moving . . . the weirdest thing can be awesome."⁴³ Being in touch with people, and local community was a theme during interviews as well:

I do want to be in touch with people. So where do I find meaning? I think it's about being engaged with art in all its forms, and the energy I get from the exchange around that art. So the meaning comes in conversation and shared communal experience, whether that's an audience at a rock concert or a movie theater or rows of chairs in an artist talk. It's communal, a community building experience. And I'm interested in being part of, I mean I think the meaning for me, is being part of community.⁴⁴

Others chose to speak more broadly. For example, one respondent stated: "Part of my joy in teaching is to help students feel like you can access your meaning. It's not the same as mine . . . but there is something out there that is normal in the world, that you can be like "ah wow" . . . in fact, I think that that's how art saves the world . . . it shows you that you can access meaning and joy even when your life is not great." Creating art, and critically interpreting it for that matter, requires individuals to be "really mindful; you have to be aware of how you're directing your attention and directing your priorities and directing your experience."⁴⁵ Lastly:

I think spaces of artist creation are essential to us thriving as societies, and every society has art . . . it's where we commune with each other as people and understand one another as people . . . Putting a work of art in front of a student, it cultivates empathy. It cultivates the idea of 'oh, here's how somebody else does it, and here are the connections I see in, say my own culture, or the things I see that are different,' and it presents difference as simply difference, not bad, not threatening, not dangerous.⁴⁶

Afterword

In times of pervasive uncertainty, as we live in today, it is crucially important that we ask difficult questions, and use critical thinking to navigate the rapidly changing world. We can also use these skills to subvert systems of oppression in the aims of building a more just future. It is equally important that we listen to others, and commit to the active exercise of empathy whenever and wherever possible. Access not only to art, but to any form of community that unapologetically supports creative ambition, is principal in fighting the war against fascism:

“Curiosity and creation are in and of themselves legitimate ends.” - Respondent

Art can be a nexus at which these vital skills meet. Art can make us a little more critical, a bit more empathetic, and a lot more human.

Endnotes

1. Gary Alan Fine, *Everyday Genius: Self-Taught Art and the Culture of Authenticity* (The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29-33.
2. Respondent(s), Interview by Maxwell Plenby, February, 2025.
3. Citations 3-46; Respondent(s), Plenby.

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Politics, Ideology, and Diplomacy:
The Reagan-China Relationship and the 1982 Communiqué

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HI-351R: U.S. And China: A Shared History
Professor Jennifer Day
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Introduction

Ronald Reagan made his view of the world clear and simple. He split the world into two sides, good capitalism and evil communism.¹ Reagan famously reiterated this view as president in his famous “Evil Empire” speech in March of 1983, where he claimed that America was fundamentally good, and the Soviet Union was part of an evil empire.² During the 1980 Republican Primary, candidate Reagan rhetorically included China as part of the evil, communist side of the world, describing the country as a member of “the evil Soviet empire” and that “it subscribes to an ideology based on a belief in destroying government like ours.”³ This rhetoric came at a time when the United States' relationship with China was far from black-and-white, as the Nixon and Carter administrations had successfully normalized relations with China while at the same time continuing to sell weapons to Taiwan. In return, the Chinese government conceded that the United States would continue to maintain commercial and cultural ties with Taiwan. The 1980 election disrupted the new status quo established by the Carter administration due to their ideological disagreements with Reagan. During the Republican primaries, Reagan had announced that he would push for renewing official relations with Taiwan, further alienating China.

This paper will explore how Reagan’s rhetoric led to a schism both between the United States and China, and between the conservative and moderate members of the Reagan administration. While the conservative faction viewed China as a fundamental enemy in the Cold

¹ Jana Sehnálková, “Reagan’s China Policy 1980-1982: Reagan v. Haig And The Controversy Over Arms Sales to Taiwan”. American Center, U.S. Embassy Prague, 2012, 153.

² Ronald Reagan, “Evil Empire Speech”, March 8 1983.

³ Jie Che, *Ideology in U.S. foreign policy: case studies in U.S. China Policy*. (Praeger, 1992), 96.

War and could not be trusted, the more pragmatic members of the administration saw China as a potential ally that could weaken the Soviet Union. As I will explore later in the paper, some saw a China that was changing, opening itself up to foreign investment and trade. This was a China that the United States could do business with and be a stronger strategic partner in Asia compared to Taiwan. This schism between the hard right and moderates within the Republican party forced President Reagan to reassess his administration's relationship between the United States and China. This position would be expressed through the negotiations and eventual release of the 1982 communiqué. How did Reagan's ideological position on China shift from his candidacy to the release of the 1982 communiqué, and how does the communiqué express this shift?

Furthermore, I will also explore how the People's Republic of China viewed the Reagan administration, and whether the signing of the 1982 communiqué significantly altered their views and policies regarding the United States. When China decided to force the United States to clarify its position on selling arms to Taiwan, this led to a period of uncertainty in United States-China relations that would only be quelled by the negotiations of the August 1982 United States-China communiqué. I will explore how Reagan's rhetoric and policy changed and constituted a fundamental ideological shift. This shift did not have the absolutism of the conservatives' view that China was an evil enemy or the moderates' view that China was an important Cold War ally, but instead viewed China as an economic partner. This policy change would have major ramifications for the future of the United States-China relationship in the 1980s and beyond.

We must also look at other scholarship on the 1982 communiqué and the Reagan administration's relationship with China. There is a large amount of scholarship on the 1979 communiqué, which normalized official relations between the United States and China, but there

is less on the 1982 communiqué. The scholarship that does exist presents from a particular point of view, such as Jaw-ling Joanne Chang's article "Negotiation of the 17 August 1982 United States-Arms Communiqué: Beijing's Negotiating Tactics"⁴, which focuses specifically on China and its interests in the negotiations of the communiqué. In contrast, Jim Mann's book *About Face* provides an American-centric point of view of the Reagan administration's relationship with China and compares it to other presidential administrations in a far more macro-view of the United States and China's relationship over the years. Both scholarship will be useful to refer to, but my argument will focus more on the ideology behind the decisions made by Reagan and his administration concerning China, how that ideology changed, and what effects that had.

The 1980 Election and Uncertainty in United States-China Relations

During the 1980 election, the Reagan campaign used its ideological position on Taiwan and China and the Carter administration's relations with Taiwan and China to criticize the administration and promote its ideological position. The fact that the Carter administration had normalized relations with China and not defended Taiwan exposed a weakness that Reagan aimed to exploit. This began before the election, with Reagan visiting Taiwan in April of 1978, along with his wife Nancy Reagan, and Richard Allen, his foreign policy advisor.⁵ Reagan and his entourage met with Taiwan's leader, President Chiang Ching-kuo. This visit continued Reagan's public commitment to Taiwan and the position of the conservative wing of the Republican Party as an ally of Taiwan. At the luncheon speech in Taipei, Reagan said, "It is hard

⁴ Jaw-ling Joanne Chang, "Negotiation of the 17 August 1982 U.S.-PRC Arms Communiqué: Beijing's Negotiating Tactics. *The China Quarterly*, no. 125 (1991).

⁵ Jim Mann, *About Face: a history of America's curious relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton*, (Alfred Knopf : Random House), 115.

for me to believe that any sensible American who believes in individual liberty and self-determination would stand by and let my government abandon an ally whose only ‘sins’ are that it is small and loves freedom.”⁶ This quote not only shows Reagan’s public commitment to Taiwan, but it also connects his support for Taiwan to his political ideology of individualism and conservatism. This ideology would be the dominant rationale behind Reagan’s position on Taiwan, which would inform his initial relationship with China. Reagan also promoted the idea that he would reestablish official relations with Taiwan and that there would be “no more betrayal of friends and allies by the United States government.”⁷ This idea disturbed the foreign policy of the United States at the time of normalization with China and made a clear break with the Carter administration’s position regarding Taiwan. However, this break in policy also disconcerted Reagan’s advisors and led them to attempt to moderate Reagan’s position.

The moderates within Reagan’s camp attempted to downplay Reagan’s controversial comments by directly appealing to China. Reagan’s advisor on foreign policy, Richard Allen, and Reagan’s vice-presidential nominee, George H.W. Bush, advocated that they visit China.⁸ This visit aimed to defuse the Taiwan issue for China, and use Bush’s former position as the United States liaison office in Beijing to ingratiate the Reagan administration with China.⁹ The visit initially went well, with Bush explaining to Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua that Reagan did not want to reestablish diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and urged that “Don’t be deceived by the rhetoric, and read Reagan’s language very carefully...we are not calling for any change in

⁶ Mann, *About Face*, 115.

⁷ Sehnáľková, “Reagan’s China Policy 1980-1982,” 153.

⁸ Mann, *About Face*, 116.

⁹ Mann, *About Face*, 116.

policy.”¹⁰ This distinction that what Reagan said was simply rhetoric and that his rhetoric was different from what he intended to do is an important point. It created uncertainty in the relationship between the Chinese government and Reagan and led to a divide within Reagan’s camp on how to proceed in this relationship. This divide is a crucial theme in the relationship between the Reagan administration and China because it marks the point when the rhetoric of Reagan’s campaign on the issue of Taiwan and China would become the most important divide between China and Reagan.

For example, the day after Bush clarified Reagan’s remarks, Reagan made another statement that indicated he favored an official relationship with Taiwan, which incensed Chinese officials and strained relations between the two sides.¹¹ This strained relationship would only be slightly quelled when Reagan was convinced by his advisors to make a statement that he would not try to undo or renegotiate the terms of America’s formal recognition of China.¹² Before he made this statement, however, Reagan sat down and began to draft a statement of his own, which, according to Reagan advisor James Lilley, if those words had ever been uttered, the United States might have come close to war.”¹³ This again points to a clear difference between what Reagan might truly believe and what he rhetorically stated, as Reagan was convinced to make the first statement to placate the Taiwan issue in the United States. However, this statement did not quell Chinese concerns about Reagan and his concerns about arms deals with Taiwan. To understand this, we must look at the Chinese perspective on the prospective Reagan presidency.

¹⁰ Mann, *About Face*, 117.

¹¹ Mann, *About Face*, 117.

¹² Mann, *About Face*, 117.

¹³ Mann, *About Face*, 118.

Before Reagan's campaign statements on Taiwan had been made, there had already been a schism in the relationship between China and the United States through the actions of the Carter administration. This was because of the decision in 1980 by Carter to authorize the sale of arms to foreign countries, including Taiwan.¹⁴ This decision was criticized by the PRC-controlled New China News Agency for violating the stipulations of the normalization agreement between the United States and China.¹⁵ This sales issue would become of major importance during the negotiations of the 1982 communiqué. In response to Reagan's comments on restoring official relations with Taiwan, the NCNA warned Reagan that "if carried into practice, [this] would wreck the very foundation of Sino-United States relations."¹⁶ This prompted Bush's visit to China in August of 1980, which failed to reassure Chinese leaders about Reagan's intentions. Despite Reagan walking back his position on Taiwan and stating that he would maintain the partnership between the United States and China, the issue was still of great importance to the Chinese.¹⁷ The Chinese were also concerned about the United States' position globally in the Cold War against the Soviet Union, which they opposed. According to Reagan's Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, the Chinese were disappointed by the state of detente in the Cold War and thought that America was too passive in the face of Soviet hegemonism.¹⁸ They were also concerned about the lack of economic and technological benefits they'd received since

¹⁴ Jaw-ling Joanne Chang, "Negotiation of the 17 August 1982 U.S.-PRC Arms Communiqué: Beijing's Negotiating Tactics. *The China Quarterly*, no. 125 (1991), 37.

¹⁵ "Text of the New China News Agency report in Foreign Broadcast Information Service", Daily Report: People's Republic of China, 23 June 1980, p. B1.

¹⁶ "Chinese media criticizes Reagan's statement on Taiwan," FBIS, PRC, 16 June 1980, p. B3.

¹⁷ "Ronald Reagan on U.S. policy toward Asia and the Pacific," Press Release, Los Angeles, CA, 25 August 1980, cited in Martin L. Lasater, *U.S. Policy Toward China's Reunification* (Heritage Foundation, 1988), pp. 26-27.

¹⁸ Alexander Haig, *Caveat* (MacMillan, 1984) p. 196.

normalization, complaining that “instead of credits and technical assistance, China received an influx of American businessmen seeking profits.”¹⁹ The issue of United States passivity became a lesser concern after Reagan’s victory, as Reagan’s ideological stance against the Soviet Union and the decision to discontinue détente would please the Chinese, who had complained about the American passivity. The issue with which the Chinese were most concerned was the United States continuing to sell arms to Taiwan. Chinese officials decided to confront the Reagan administration with this issue after Reagan took office.

China’s concerns about the relationship between the United States and Taiwan go back to 1971, when the first joint communiqué was released by the United States and China in 1972. This communiqué was negotiated by President Richard Nixon, his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, and White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig.²⁰ The communiqué included a commitment by both parties to expand economic and cultural contact, but without any concrete steps to accomplish this. The communiqué also continued the statement that the United States formally “acknowledged” that “all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China.”²¹ The use of the word “acknowledge” instead of “accept” allowed the United States some ambiguity in its relationship with Taiwan. Chinese leaders found this statement to be not unequivocal enough to normalize relations with the United States. The second communiqué

¹⁹ Haig, *Caveat*, 196.

²⁰ “Shanghai Communiqué,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Communic%C3%A9.

²¹ “Rapprochement with China” Office of The Historian, U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/rapprochement-china#:~:text=Nixon%20travelled%20to%20Communist%20China,to%20normalization%2C%20the%20Taiwan%20issue>.

went further than the first by recognizing the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and acknowledged the PRC's position that Taiwan was a part of China.²² Beyond that, the United States declared that it would end formal political relations with Taiwan, but preserve economic and cultural ties. This commitment allowed for the normalization of relations between the two countries. As stated previously, Ronald Reagan was critical of the Carter administration for breaking off diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1978 and reiterated his support for reestablishing "official relations" with Taiwan during the 1980 election.²³ By studying the commitments made in these communiqués, we can see how China was slowly pushing the United States closer to its political priorities and position regarding Taiwan, and also why clarifying the Reagan-China relationship was so crucial for both parties.

The Reagan Administration and the PRC: Divide, Debate, and Disagreement

In the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 election and inauguration in 1981, the issue of China and the sale of weapons to Taiwan became a contentious debate within the new administration. This debate divided the moderate and conservative camps with Reagan's cabinet, especially between President Reagan and his Secretary of State Alexander Haig.²⁴ Haig had previously been Chief of Staff for Nixon and Assistant to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and aimed to forge a stronger relationship with China to defeat the Soviet Union,

²² "Address by President Carter to the Nation," Office of The Historian, U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v01/d104>.

²³ Don Oberdorfer, "Reagan Mired in Touchy China Dispute", *Washington Post*, August 20, 1980 cited from Ronald Reagan Library, Folder: China, Box: 127, Ronald Reagan 1980 Campaign Papers, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/2022-04/40-656-7386356-127-016-2022.pdf>

²⁴ Mann, *About Face*, 118.

which was ideologically opposed to Reagan and the conservative wing within his administration.²⁵ Haig viewed China as an important strategic ally in the Cold War; he later asserted in his memoirs:

In terms of the strategic interests of the United States and the West...China may well be the most important country in the world...The Chinese do not believe that the United States and its allies can bring about the neutralization of Soviet adventurism without the participation of China, or that China can do so without the participation of the United States and the West.²⁶

Haig's point of view left little room for nuance in what the relationship between the United States and China could be economically or politically, because it reduced their relationship to one priority: The Cold War. This made negotiations between the two countries more difficult. This difference in ideology became most apparent when Haig visited China in June of 1981, and told the Chinese that the Reagan administration was willing to sell lethal arms to China, and then announced this sudden change in American foreign policy at a Beijing press conference, stunning many members of the Reagan administration who were unaware of this change in policy.²⁷ Before Haig had even departed China, Reagan stated at a news conference in Washington, "I have not changed my feelings about Taiwan. We have an act, a law called the Taiwan Relations Act, that provides for defense equipment being sold to Taiwan. I intend to live up to the Taiwan Relations Act."²⁸ These different priorities between Haig and Reagan on Taiwan and China would become the main disagreement between the two and would eventually lead to

²⁵ Mann, *About Face*, 119.

²⁶ Haig, *Caveat*, 194.

²⁷ Mann, *About Face*, 121.

²⁸ Mann, *About Face*, quoted from Gene T. Hsiao, "A Renewed Crisis over Taiwan," in Hsiao and Witunsky, eds., *Sino-American Normalization and Its Policy Implications*, 94.

Haig's resignation, demonstrating the importance that ideology played in the Reagan administration's relationship with China. This ideological split within the administration between moderates and conservatives would continue to divide them on China and Taiwan, and it would fall to President Reagan to decide on which camp to follow.

The disagreements within the Reagan administration led to China becoming more aggressive in demanding that the United States stop selling arms to Taiwan. The Chinese were able to recognize the split between Haig and Reagan on foreign policy and took advantage of this split to push forward their own interests.²⁹ In August of 1981, China suspended all military cooperation with the United States until concessions were made on the United States' arms sales to Taiwan, and refused to accept Haig's offer to sell weapons to China until the United States made its position on Taiwan clear.³⁰ Through this strategy, China was slowly putting more pressure on the United States to move closer to its position regarding Taiwan.

On October 29th, 1981, Foreign Minister Huang Hua and Premier Zhao Ziyang met with President Reagan and Alexander Haig at a summit meeting in Cancun, Mexico.³¹ In this meeting, Huang told Haig that the United States "must specify the period of time over which it intended to sell arms to Taiwan, undertake that sales in any given year would not exceed the level of the Carter years, and indicate that sales would decline year by year and then cease."³² The Chinese aggressive demands reveal that the Chinese did not fear the Reagan administration and instead saw the lack of consensus within the administration as an opportunity to push their strategic

²⁹ Sehnáľková, "Reagan's China Policy 1980-1982," 160.

³⁰ Sehnáľková, "Reagan's China Policy 1980-1982," 164.

³¹ Chang, "Negotiation of the 17 August 1982 U.S.-PRC Arms Communiqué," 41.

³² Haig, *Caveat*, 210.

interests regarding Taiwan. These demands are what led to the beginning of negotiations of the 1982 communiqué, which would attempt to address them.

Ronald Reagan and China: Shifting Views and Competitive Partners

During Reagan's first year in office, his view of China began to slowly shift from the simplistic view he had expressed during his campaign to a more nuanced view, which led to a paradigm shift in how Reagan saw the Chinese. This shift was made by people close to Reagan who visited China and met with Chinese officials. These visitors were able to identify the priorities of the Chinese government aside from their concern about Taiwan and the Soviet Union. They also pointed out to Reagan promising signs of the economic liberalization that China was undergoing at the time. One of these perspectives that reached Reagan was an old friend of his from his time as an actor: Douglas Morrow. On November 30th, 1981, Douglas Morrow sent a letter to President Ronald Reagan titled "Impressions of China." Douglas Morrow was an American film producer and writer who earned an Academy Award for his script for the 1949 film *The Stratton Story*.³³ Warner Brothers contract player Ronald Reagan sought the main role in the film, but the studio refused to lend him to MGM. Morrow remained a friend of Reagan's, and they continued private correspondences throughout Reagan's presidency.

In this letter, Morrow met with Chinese government officials and was given a guided tour of particular areas of China. It is unclear how Morrow was able to gain access to the Chinese officials that he spoke to in the letter, but it is clear that he was given more access to these officials than what an average United States citizen would receive. One of the officials who

³³ Stratton Story, IMDB. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041928/>

received the letter was Counselor to the President Edwin Meese, whose papers are where this document was found. Acting Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs James W. Nance wrote that “[Morrow] prepared the attached memorandum for the President on his observations. Because it is so informative and interestingly written, the President asked that you be provided a copy for your edification.”³⁴ It is worth noting that Reagan thought the letter was significant and informative enough that it should be provided to his cabinet to read.

This source focuses on three subjects that Morrow claims the Chinese are “obsessed” with: the United States’ position on Taiwan, the need for United States technological assistance, and the Soviet Union. Morrow begins the memo by clarifying that he did not speak for the President or the State Department and that he was just a private citizen.³⁵ This disclaimer is provided to demonstrate the supposed independence of the author in his discourse with Chinese officials. However, it does not account for the fact that the author would be providing these observations to the government and, therefore, would likely be influenced by this association in their interactions with the Chinese. This source provides an American-centric point of view of the Chinese government's political priorities and how they view the United States and its position on these priorities. For example, when Morrow and the Chinese officials are talking about the United States’ position on Taiwan and whether President Reagan could persuade the American people to agree with his plan to sell Airborne Warning And Control (AWAC) surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia, Morrow writes that the Chinese ask “a little triumphantly, and a bit naively, they said, “Why, then can’t [Reagan] also persuade them that the United States should not sell arms to

³⁴ “Letter From Douglas Morrow to President Ronald Reagan, August 1982,” folder “Chinese Communique”, box CF0219, Edwin Meese Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁵ “Morrow to President Ronald Reagan,” Ronald Reagan Library, 1.

Taiwan?”³⁶ How Morrow editorializes on the Chinese response demonstrates his biases and that he is presenting a particular narrative about how the Chinese view Reagan and the United States. This narrative influences how Morrow writes about the Chinese officials and their reforms, and paints them as naive in their view of Reagan.

Morrow goes on to describe the economic reforms that the Chinese businesses were undergoing, such as industrial reforms and “free enterprise” zones. He describes how peasants are required to fulfill quotas for the state-controlled communal acreage, but are also increasingly allowed private acreage and other enterprises, and can bring what they produce into free market areas without state involvement.³⁷ Morrow emphasizes these reforms throughout this letter, which would have suggested to Reagan that China was changing and becoming more capitalistic in its system. While he holds off from stating that China would change its economic system, he states that:

“It is...possible that somewhere down the road, as younger, educated and modernly trained generations move up, we may see a country that retains its communist dogma, politically and sociologically, but gradually moves into a quasi-capitalist mode in its economy and world trade.”³⁸

Consider that Reagan was reading this in the immediate prelude to the negotiations of the 1982 communiqué. Morrow’s line of thinking would suggest to him a view that China was not only changing internally but also might be more willing to do business with the United States and promote a capitalist ideology that would be far more palatable to Reagan’s ideology.

³⁶ “Douglas Morrow to President Ronald Reagan,” Ronald Reagan Library, 2.

³⁷ “Douglas Morrow to President Ronald Reagan,” Ronald Reagan Library, 12.

³⁸ “Douglas Morrow to President Ronald Reagan,” Ronald Reagan Library, 14.

Morrow's letter is comprehensive in the observations it makes about Chinese society and how it is changing, including mentions of the "free-market shops" which Morrow notes were favored by the Chinese guides over the state-owned shops, as they had "better products. Cooked more carefully. And they'll be more anxious to please the customer because they own the business."³⁹ Morrow included these points to show Reagan that the Chinese economic system was changing and was different from the Soviet system that he was so prejudiced against.

This narrative allowed the Reagan officials to view China in a different way, which gave them a sense of ideological and strategic security in their negotiations with the Chinese, to project their political priorities onto China in talks, and therefore negotiate from a position of strength. Memos such as Morrow's are an example of a different view on China that may have influenced how Reagan thought of the Chinese and their government.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the release of the 1982 communiqué, the relationship between Reagan and China did not immediately become more friendly. In Jim Mann's book *About Face*, Mann states that "Shortly after the arms communiqué with China was issued, Reagan moved, secretly and unilaterally, to eviscerate what he had just signed."⁴⁰ Reagan wrote a short one-page memo stating his interpretation of what he had just released, stating that the United States would restrict arms sales to Taiwan as long as the balance of military power between China and Taiwan was preserved and that if China improved its military capabilities, the United States would help Taiwan match those improvements. This memo was placed in a safe at the National Security

³⁹ "Douglas Morrow to President Ronald Reagan," Ronald Reagan Library, 15

⁴⁰ Mann, *About Face*, 127.

Council, only to be privately referred to by United States officials when considering handling arms sales to Taiwan. Although one could view this as a repudiation or ‘evisceration’ of the entire purpose of the communiqué or a change in Reagan’s ideological stance, I view it differently. This memo marks a pragmatic shift in Reagan’s thinking that is markedly different from the absolutism of good and evil that he demonstrated at the beginning of the paper. Through this memo, Reagan was able to balance his concern for Taiwan and the rest of Asia while also slowly building a friendlier relationship with China through economic liberalization.

Surprisingly, the Reagan administration would eventually form a closer working relationship with China than any administration had before. As China continued to liberalize and westernize domestically, it would continue to increasingly trade arms and technology with the United States and get closer diplomatically. Zhao Zigan visited the United States in January 1984. Ronald Reagan visited China in April of 1984. These trips were a major step in an increasingly friendly relationship between the United States and China, with the issue of Taiwan being put aside in favor of increased arms trade between both nations. As Reagan was leaving China, he was interviewed by reporters and referred to China as a “so-called Communist country.”⁴¹ This comment demonstrates how Reagan’s views on the Chinese political and economic system had changed significantly. This view of how liberal China had become would be challenged significantly in 1989, as the economic liberalization that occurred in China did not correlate with expanding the freedoms of the Chinese people.

Through the negotiations of the 1982 communiqué, how the United States and China viewed each other changed significantly. While Reagan had entered office as a strong anti-

⁴¹ Mann, *About Face*, 147.

communist and the biggest supporter of Taiwan, by 1984 his ideology regarding China and its threat to Taiwan had shifted and become closer to China than the conservatives within his administration would have expected. Through the views of others on China, the strategic tactics of the Chinese, and the clash of ideologies within his administration, Reagan's view of China would become more complex than the black-and-white view that he had spoken about during his candidacy.

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Not a Heroine:

The Transgender Identity and Colonial Brutality of Catalina de Erauso

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Fashioning the Self
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Transgenderism has always been a highly controversial and highly politicized way of expression. Attempts to be perceived as the opposite gender have, for most of history, been considered a crime, and to this day many governments still criminalize transgenderism. Only a select handful of people have been made into heroes for assuming the role of the opposite gender. Saint Joan of Arc, for example, (despite being burned at the stake for dressing as a man) is revered by the Catholic Church for her role as a cross-dressed soldier in the Hundred Years' War. Egyptian Pharaoh Hatshepsut is another example of a transvestite who found infamy from her manliness. Catalina de Erauso, however, might be the most interesting case of transgender heroism due to his legal and religious acceptance both in Europe and the New World. Catalina de Erauso was born a biological woman in the year 1585 in San Sebastian, Spain. He was destined from birth to join a convent, but ran away before taking his final vows. Upon Erauso's escape from the convent, he fashioned himself a man's outfit out of his convent uniform and fully adopted the identity of a man. Under the guise of manhood, Erauso made his way to Latin America, where he worked intermittently as a conquistador and a merchant, constantly on the run from the law for murder and thievery. He eventually confessed himself to be a biological woman to a bishop, and after writing an autobiography, he became infamous for bending gender norms. Erauso traveled back to Europe and was rewarded for his services by the King of Spain despite the illegal nature of cross-dressing, and was granted freedom to continue dressing as a man by Pope Urban VIII.

Erauso is often put on a pedestal for overcoming gender norms and living a life full of adventure in South America. He is commonly read by scholars as a proto-feminist icon, who did what he wanted, when he wanted, how he wanted. Portraying Erauso as a quasi-heroine is rather problematic, as Erauso was violent and murderous often for no reason other than as a means of

revenge. Similar to other Spanish conquistadors who arrived in the New World, there was a certain lust for blood within Erauso that we should not ignore even when examining his unusual and remarkable life. Many scholars ultimately refer to Erauso as a woman who wore a man's disguise. In *The Manly Woman* by Mary Elizabeth Perry, Perry refers to Erauso as a woman in a "male disguise."¹ Despite recognizing that Erauso preferred to be known as a male, both Sherry Velasco in *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, and Catalina de Erauso* and Eva Mendieta in *In Search of Catalina de Erauso: The National and Sexual Identity of the Lieutenant Nun* ultimately refer to Erauso using she/her pronouns. Scholars who refer to Erauso as a woman completely ignore the male identity Erauso created for himself.

The argument about Erauso's gender identity focuses on whether Erauso was a transvestite or transgender male. A transvestite is a person who dresses and acts according to the social norms of the opposite gender. Seventeenth century transvestite women tended to cross-dress for safety, romantic, patriotic, or economic reasons.² As we can tell from his autobiography, Erauso certainly did not dress as a man for safety reasons, as he rather sought out danger with his male identity via his escapades as a conquistador and an outlaw. There is no mention whatsoever of romantic reasons for cross dressing, as throughout the autobiography Erauso did not have many serious romantic inclinations. It is possible that Erauso dressed as a man for economic or patriotic reasons, but this too seems unlikely due to the long-lasting nature of his masculinity. When Erauso returned to Europe after revealing his biological sex, he received a pension from King Philip IV for his patriotism. This would have satisfied any

¹ Mary Elizabeth Perry, "The Manly Woman," *American Behavioral Scientist* 31, no. 1 (September 1987): 86–100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276487031001006>, 86.3

² Eva Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso: The National and Sexual Identity of the Lieutenant Nun*, trans. Angeles Prado (Reno, Nevada: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, 2009), 169.

economic or patriotic reasons for cross-dressing; however, Erauso wanted to continue being a man and was granted a papal dispensation to do so. Erauso lived as a man for the rest of his life, which suggests that his masculine identity went deeper than surface level. As Mendieta puts it “After living as a man for long years, the transformation experienced by Erauso went beyond just [his] clothing and [his] physical appearance.”³ Erauso was not a cross dresser, rather he was a transgender male who fully adopted the identity of a man. Masculinity was not a disguise for Erauso, it was who he was.

Identifying as a transgender person encompasses more than wanting to dress like a male and do traditionally male activities. Transgenderism includes a total difference in the psychology of an individual. Erauso’s biological sex may be female, but his gender is not. According to psychologists Daniel Schacter, Daniel Gilbert, and Matthew Nock, “gender refers to our identities—how we see ourselves, how we want others to see us, and how it feels to be inside our own skins.”⁴ Certainly, we can derive from his autobiography that Erauso wanted us to see him as a male. We can only make educated guesses as to whether that is how Erauso felt inside his skin. In Ian Frederick Moulton’s *“A Monster Great Deformed”: The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III*, Moulton discusses the mindset that predominated male-identifying individuals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He describes the “conventional gender ideology” of men as “active, bold, [and] strong.”⁵ Based on Erauso’s depictions of his fights, crimes, and generally fierce lifestyle, we can assume that he aligns with the stereotypical male psychology of the day. Another potentially telling fact was that Erauso’s transition coincided with his

³ Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 195.4

⁴ Daniel Schacter, Daniel Gilbert, and Matthew Nock, *Psychology*, 6th ed. (Worth Publishers, 2023), 427.

⁵ Ian Frederick Moulton, “‘A Monster Great Deformed’: The Unruly Masculinity of Richard III,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1996): 251–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2871377>, 254.

adolescence. Adolescence is the time of psychological sexual awakening due to changing hormones in the body, and the adolescent years are often when self-discoveries about sexuality and gender identity are made.⁶ It would follow that as Erauso psychologically transitioned into adulthood, he realized he identified with the male gender. Gender identity is psychological and can be hard to pinpoint, especially in historical figures who lived at a time when defined transgenderism was nonexistent. By reading how Erauso presented himself in his autobiography, we get a peek into how he wished to be identified.

Erauso reveals that he is a biological female to a bishop after the bishop intervenes in one of Erauso's many encounters with the law. In his autobiography, Erauso describes how he felt the presence of God and the saintliness of the bishop and decided to tell him the whole truth.⁷ This moment of transgression against the male identity Erauso had heretofore portrayed is often misrepresented as an acceptance of his female sex. Rather, by revealing his biological sex Erauso is playing his last card in a desperate attempt to save himself from what is bound to be the death penalty due to his many infractions with the law. Luckily for Erauso, his last resort worked. The bishop declared that "the viceregal court could not execute this person because she was a nun, subject first to ecclesiastical law."⁸ For a brief period of time, Erauso lived in a convent in the New World, where he re-assumed a female identity. However, because Erauso never took the final vows, he was also free from ecclesiastical laws. Essentially, Erauso avoided both secular and ecclesiastical law. By playing his cards right, Erauso managed to escape what certainly would have been the death penalty, and dodged punishment by the church because he had never actually become a nun. Erauso did not reveal his sex because he wanted to, he did so

⁶ Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 195.

⁷ Catalina de Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, trans. Michele Stepto and Gabriel Stepto (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 64.

⁸ Perry, "The Manly Woman," 86.

because it was his last resort. Mistaking his revelation to be affirming his female identity is mistaking the motivation behind the reveal. Erauso is able to secure the blessing of both the King of Spain and the Pope to continue life as a man. This is a rather surprising event, due to the potential legal and societal repercussions of presenting differently than one's assigned gender in Europe. Erauso is able to achieve both the King's and the Pope's approval in part by remaining asexual. Because his virginity is still intact, Erauso is seen as a *mujer varonil* (manly woman), or a "woman who departed from the norm in an admirable or positive way" as opposed to women who had lost their sexual honor.⁹ Because Erauso was chaste, both Spain and the church could use Erauso as a model for an ideal *mujer varonil*. To earn the adjective of manly, a person also had to act in the realm of masculinity. Erauso fulfilled this requirement by fighting valiantly for Spain as a conquistador in the New World. Because Erauso had fought valiantly in the name of Spain he received a pension from the King, and because he remained chaste he received a papal dispensation to continue dressing as a man. Erauso lived the rest of his life in a comparatively quiet manner as a man in the New World, under his new name Antonio de Erauso.

Erauso's autobiography depicts a very violent lifestyle. He constantly murdered people and was near death himself several times. He recounts his various murders with a sense of pride. In one instance, Erauso describes a killing spree where he "spur[s] his horse on, trampling and killing and slaughtering more men than there are numbers."¹⁰ This open admission of the extreme violence Erauso took part in, without any sense of guilt or regret, is why scholars should be wary of considering Erauso as a heroine. Erauso also took part in the slaughter of the indigenous peoples of South America. He wrote once that he "butchered so many of [the native

⁹ Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 172.

¹⁰ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 20.

people] that blood ran like a river across the plaza.”¹¹ Here again the lack of remorse for killing what was likely hundreds of Native Americans is quite disturbing. Erauso is most certainly an interesting example of expression of gender identity in the sixteenth century, but should not be read or viewed as a heroine and proto-feminist icon because his violent and murderous actions were anything but heroic.

Erauso’s outward appearance reflected the male identity that was likely occurring inside. It speaks to his masculinity that the first thing he did upon his escape from the convent was fashion himself a man’s outfit. Even once he arrived in the New World, where he could have dropped the male disguise, he chose to remain a man. Erauso was also quite physically masculine. He dominated on the battlefield and in street brawls. In a letter written by Pedro de la Valle after an encounter with Erauso, Valle writes that Erauso was “tall and powerfully built.”¹² Erauso’s mental masculinity manifested itself physically, and Erauso began to resemble a man. Gender-affirming surgeries may be a recent medical procedure, but that did not stop Erauso from attempting to alter his female biology. In his description, Valle mentions that Erauso “had no more breasts than a girl” and “had used some sort of remedy to make them disappear.”¹³ Erauso’s attempt to change his biology tells us that the male identity went much deeper than the surface. Such a remedy may be irreversible, suggesting that Erauso had no intentions of ever giving up his male identity. Erauso’s outward appearance suggests that he wanted to fully adopt the identity of a man, and that masculinity was not just a disguise used to allow for patriotic displays or economic freedom.

Erauso did not treat other women very kindly, and he often used them to get more money

¹¹ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 34.

¹² Qtd. in Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 199.

¹³ Qtd. in Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 199.

and goods. He writes of a time he lived with a mother and a daughter, with whom it was assumed he would marry. Erauso writes that the girl was “as black and ugly as the devil himself” but that he still “pretended to be overcome with happiness”¹⁴ at the proposal of marriage to her. The woman gave him all sorts of gifts in honor of his union with her daughter, but right before the marriage occurred, Erauso “stole a mule and cleared out.”¹⁵ Erauso’s intentions were never to marry the girl, but he took advantage of her and got money, clothes, and other gifts out of the relationship. He never cared about the girl’s feelings or her honor, signifying that he did not care about the well-being of other women and only wanted what was best for himself. Erauso jilts another girl in a similar fashion. From the girl he receives “a suit of good velvet, twelve shirts, six pairs of Rouen breeches, a collar of fine Dutch linen, a dozen handkerchiefs, and two hundred pesos in a silver dish.” After receiving these gifts, Erauso “saddled up and vanished.”¹⁶ Erauso was not interested in helping womankind, he was a womanizer who took economic advantage of females. He simply cannot be described as a proto-feminist, because he hurt, not helped, other women.

It is clear in the autobiography that Erauso disliked being identified as anything other than a man. Erauso did maintain certain feminine features, as Valle noted he did not have facial hair and had feminine hands.¹⁷ Because of these few distinguishing marks, Erauso was often mistaken as a eunuch. Getting misidentified as a eunuch is most likely what led to many of Erauso’s street fights.¹⁸ In his autobiography, several of Erauso’s murders happen because he gets called an insult that questions his masculinity. On one occasion, Erauso gets called a

¹⁴ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 28.

¹⁵ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 28.

¹⁶ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 29.

¹⁷ Qtd. in Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 199.

¹⁸ Mendieta, *In Search of Catalina de Erauso*, 196.

cuckold, and in response Erauso writes that he “drew out my dagger and ran it into his chest.”¹⁹ Erauso took offense to being seen as a lesser man, and fought back against those who insulted him. He simply wanted to be known as a man, and anything else was unacceptable and grounds for murder. After Erauso is discovered to be a biological woman, Erauso is incorrectly gendered as “Señora Catalina” by two women, and Erauso threatens “one hundred strokes to [their] pretty little necks” for calling him a woman rather than a man.²⁰ In the Seville manuscript of Erauso’s autobiography, Erauso attacks the two women. He writes “I gave them many slaps and kicks and was tempted to cut their faces.”²¹ Erauso takes his male identity seriously, and is not pleased when people misgender him and try to categorize him as anything less than a genuine man.

The issue with portraying Erauso as a female heroine is twofold. First off, Erauso is not a female, despite his biology. In all other categories, Erauso presents (and wants to be perceived) as male. Erauso is not simply wearing male clothing, he is fighting like a male, talking like a male, flirting like a male, and acting like a male. Erauso’s manhood is not a disguise, it is his identity. Recognizing Erauso as anything other than a man is ignoring the concrete male identity Erauso so plainly embodied. Secondly, classifying Erauso as an icon for his gender-bending completely ignores the horrendous violence in which Erauso participated. During his time in Latin America, he murdered hundreds of indigenous people and actively took part in the enslavement and transportation of the indigenous. He fought and killed any man who disagreed with him in the slightest, and he was so blinded by his toxic masculinity that no insult or question to his authority could be avenged by anything but a fight to the death. Erauso was

¹⁹ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 22.

²⁰ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*, 80.

²¹ Qtd. in Sherry Velasco, *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, and Catalina de Erauso* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 4.

extremely problematic, and he should not be treated as a hero or an icon just because he broke the tightly bound gender norms that existed in the seventeenth century.

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Portrait of Captain Cook

Juliet Young
Acrylic on canvas, 2025

