THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE COLONIZATION OF MEDIA:
INDIGENEITY, AESTHETICS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
BETWEEN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2023

for Ambrie, Skyler, and Jazlyn

Imagine we are looking at a garden through a window. Our eyes adjust themselves so that our glance penetrates the glass without lingering upon it, and seizes upon the flowers and foliage. As the goal of vision towards which we direct our glance is the garden, we do not see the pane of glass and our gaze passes through it. The clearer the glass, the less we see it. But later, by making an effort, we can ignore the garden, and, by retracting our focus, let it rest on the window-pane. Then the garden disappears from our eyes, and all we see of it are some confused masses of colour which seem to adhere to the glass. Thus to see the garden and to see the window-pane are two incompatible operations: the one excludes the other and they each require a different focus.

— José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art" (1925)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the course of my doctoral studies, many people have supported my small successes, and many others have undermined them. In this section, I would like to acknowledge some of the former. My most direct gratitude goes to my committee. Darby English, who was on my side from the beginning. Ross Stolzenberg, who took a leap of faith and is the definition of magnanimity. W.J.T. Mitchell, whose critiques are both incisive and generous. Matthew Jesse Jackson, who talked me down from the ledge more than once and always met me on my own terms. I owe my greatest debt to my adviser, Terry Nichols Clark, whose patience verges on infinite and who sees in me what I'm still unable to see in myself—I hope this was worth all the late-night strategy calls and reams of dictated notes.

On the circuitous path to my dissertation, I've enjoyed many conversations across the University, such as Cécile Fromont, Andrei Pop, Danielle Roper, and Martha Ward. Just as important—if not more so—are those who nurtured the artistic dimensions of my practice over the years: Evan Bravos, Kara Brody, Leslie Buxbaum Danzig, Katherine Desjardins, Amber Ginsburg, Laura Letinsky, Ben Lytal, Mickle Maher, Patrice Michaels, William Pope.L, Julia Rhoads, and Scott Wolniak. Gifted and sympathetic editors like Elisa Wouk Almino, Jon Baskin, David Buuck, Hernán Caro, Melissa Chadburn, Sarah Chihaya, Stephanie Cristello, Michele D'Aurizio, Travis Diehl, Alan Gilbert, Tempestt Hazel, Paul Jaskunas, Steph Kretowicz, Elliot Josephine Leila Reichert, Kerry Reid, Amelia Rina, and Rachel Wiseman gave me opportunities to untangle my prose and bring my ideas to a wider audience. Logistically, I have benefited from the tireless and thankless labor of the current and former

staff of my Department: Meredith Clason, Linnea Martin, Esther Peters, Patricia Princell, and Crystal Todoroff.

Outside of Chicago, I've had the privilege of connecting with a national and international academic community that has tirelessly helped me navigate it, particularly D. Graham Burnett, Colin Gunckel, Joshua Javier Guzmán, Liam Lanigan, Marcela Oteíza, Eric Prieto, Olga Shevchenko, and Mona Schieren. Along the often solitary road of graduate school, I have often relied upon fellow travelers LaShaya Howie, Kirsten Ihns, Sila Ulug, Kari Watson, and especially Sophia Li. Beyond the academy, I have been sustained by an ocean of friends, among them Marcel Alcalá, Allison Bulger, Nic Burrier, Carley Callis, Shanel Campbell, Mairead Case, Lizzie Catalano, Morgan Childers, Jesse Clark, Jeremy Dennis, Matthew Donovan, An Emard, Holly Harrell, Paul Heyer, Gregoire Kercy, Leander Knust, André Lenox, Evan Lenox, Antonio López, Tim Mann, Jasmine Marin, Isabelle Frances McGuire, Lucy McKeon, Evgenia Ozerova, Libbi Ponce, Emma Pryde, Ratko Radojcic, Marina Resende, Kate Robards, Daniel Robles, Jack Schneider, Chloe Seibert, Cristen Shea, Dash Sheffield, Apolonia Sokol, José Taymani, Wisrah Villefort, Mia Weiner, Zhuyan Ye, Cherrie Yu, and above all Emily Barker. I would also like to single out Matthew Cohn, my COVID collaborator, and Kilee Price, who gave me my first solo show.

Finally, my deepest and longest relationships are with my family. My mother, Rita Gabaldon, and my father, William Sward, have cared for me since before I came into this world. My grandparents, Lupe and Manuel Gabaldon, housed and fed me during one of my several attempts to drop out of grad school. I dedicate this dissertation to my sisters, Ambrie, Skyler, and Jazlyn Sward, the strongest people I know.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE SELF-EVIDENT IMAGE

I. THE RISE OF THE DOCUMENTARY

You are reading this sentence. Your eyes move from left to right, jumping down one line upon reaching the right margin. You repeat this process until you reach the end of page; you start again at the top left corner of the next. You might perceive the letters as representing sounds, or you might bypass the sonic altogether and recognize their clusters as small bits of meaning. You might "subvocalize," or silently say the words to yourself. If you are blind, a screen reader might speak these words to you, or translate them into Braille. The letters belong to the Roman alphabet, though the language itself is English. The author, however, is not English, or even Scottish or Welsh, but American, a demonym used for citizens of the United States even though it strictly speaking should be able to refer to any resident of the Americas. Like any medium, English bears the marks of its history. Its core is Germanic, though heavily influenced by "high status" languages like Latin, elevated by its proximity to priests and scholars, which is why English contains high- and low-brow versions of the same word, such as "ask" from the German *āscian* versus "inquire" from the Latin *inquirere*.

While the birth of media studies is a rather recent, mediums are not. Dating back 17,000 years, the cave paintings at Lascaux portray large animals and other local fauna of the Upper Paleolithic. Since then, the history of painting has continued almost uninterrupted. But painting never developed in a vacuum. Among the most consequential influences on its trajectory was the invention of photography at the turn of the century. In his *The Soft Edge*, media ecologist Paul Levinson notes how photography "produced lifelike images much more

efficiently and reliably" than painting (Levinson 1998, 39). Rather than competing, painting focused "on the one thing it could inevitably do better than the photograph—by further developing into an art form its very subjectivity in the conception of the image, the very subjectivity that photography eliminated" (Levinson 1998, 47). Although Levinson's logic here is rather simplistic, it does offer an important insight about photography that I call its documentary function, or the supposed ability of photographs to automatically and unproblematically "capture" an external and independent reality.[1]

FIGURE 1: Jacob Riis, "Lodgers in a Bayard Street Tenement" (1889)

SOURCE: Museum of the City of New York

[1] In this way, I follow Michael Guggenheim's definition of the documentary as "the use of mechanical representations without manipulation of representation and its objects" (Guggenheim 2015, 368).

Consider the example of a pioneering photojournalist like Jacob Riis, who recorded the squalid New York City's slums in the 1880s. Just before the advent of the Progressive Era the subsequent decade, Riis and other "muckrackers" sought to raise public awareness of urban poverty, unsafe working conditions, prostitution, and child labor. Dingy and dense, the tenements of the Lower East Side of Manhattan would have been difficult to traverse even if the upper- and middle-classes had wanted to. Having spent several years reporting on crime for the *New-York Tribune*, Riis was disappointed at the limited effect his words had on the dismal conditions he daily found himself in and having already began to take photographs when producing his police reports, Riis availed himself of the newly available technology of flash powder to pierce these dark interiors. With magnesium and potassium chlorate, Riis brought to light, as he titled the resultant publication, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). Riis's intervention proved to be timely and successful, and eventually led to reforms like the New York State Tenement House Act of 1901, which required that new buildings be built with outward-facing windows in every room, proper ventilation, indoor toilets, and fire safeguards. Many of these themes, such as the use of a lens-based medium to document the living conditions of a disenfranchised or marginalized community and the presumption that such images can communicate without intermediaries, will provide us with our proverbial guiding stars.

II. AT THE SALVAGE YARDS OF HISTORY

This dissertation proposes a link between the development of artistic mediums since the nineteenth century and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples by European powers. From travelogues to photography to phonograph cylinders and beyond, anthropology

has been intertwined with media since its inception, often amid great social and political change. Historian of science Jacob Gruber has coined the phrase to "ethnographic salvage" to describe this period during the nineteenth century when "people began to sense the urgency of collection for the sake of preserving data whose extinction was feared" (Gruber 1970, 1290). This imperative operates dovetails with one of the most defining myths of national US identity: that of the "vanishing Indian," which Philip Deloria defines in *Playing Indian* as predicting that "less advanced societies should disappear in the presence of those more advanced" (Deloria 1999, 64).

As a practice, salvage ethnography is most associated with the work of Franz Boas, who attempted "to reconstruct the traditions and practices of cultures that had already suffered radical losses of integrity" (Calhoun 2002, 46). Photography was a natural destination for researchers who "encourage our faith in photographic veracity" in their "search for a transparent medium" (Jacknis 1984, 2). Though a widespread practice, the use of photography has not escaped criticism, with some accusing social scientists like Claude Lévi-Strauss of making tribes like the Nambikwara appear "more 'primitive' than they actually were at the time by removing the signs of colonial intervention from his photographs" (Fiorini 2008, 58). While the validity of such a critique is debatable, it more importantly opens up the possibility that photographs are not simple records, but creative products that themselves require interpretation and analysis. In the words of John Berger, "photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights" (Berger 1990, 10).

It is difficult for us to imagine from our current vantage point the profound upheaval that first contact had upon European subjectivity, and the ways that these issues were resolved had far-reaching impacts on the fate of Indigenous peoples across the Americas. In the 1530s, Spanish Dominican Francisco de Vitoria gave a series of lectures to determine whether the Amerindians were "barbarians" in the classical sense, and, by extension, "natural slaves."[2] As Aristotle specified, "that some should rule, and other be ruled is a thing, not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule" (Aristotle 1885, 7). Vitoria reasoned that "the Indians occupied some middle ground between 'natural' masters and slaves…. Their rationality could not be denied; but it was still not fully developed, its potential still not realized" (Bakewell and Holler 2010, 186). "Until their raising to full rationality was complete," Vitoria concluded, "Indians must stay under Spanish control, as children under their parents' formative guidance" (Bakewell and Holler 2010, 186). On May 29, 1537, Pope Paul III promulgated the bull *Sublimis Deus*, which forbade the enslavement of the "Indians of the West and South" (Paul III 1537). Through the efforts of men like Vitoria and Bartolomé de las Casas, the King passed the "New Laws" of 1542 guaranteed beneficiaries of the *encomienda* arrangement, which rewarded conquistadors with the labor of conquered non-Christians peoples, "could not demand personal services of Indians, but only tribute" (Crow 1980, 157). To this day, we can see the incredible durability of these hierarchies in, for example, the usage of the word *sumercé* in present-day Colombia.

[2] Puritan minister Thomas Thorowgood even penned a tract entitled *Jewes in America or Probabilities that the Americans are of that Race* (1650), in which he argued the Amerindians were descendants of the mythical "ten lost tribes of Israel" and would hence be especially difficult to convert to Christianity.

Essentially a polite second-person singular pronoun, *sumercé* is a contraction of the older *su merced*, literally "your mercy" (equivalent of "your grace" or "your excellency" in English). This is the term that Indigenous peoples would have used to address their colonial overlords.

I engage in this digression to emphasize how Indigenous peoples were from the beginning denied the status of full humanity, thus making them better able to become objects of knowledge. I use the noun "object" here rather self-consciously. As *Sublimis Deus*, makes clear, it was a very natural progression for Europeans to see Indigenous peoples as closer to beasts and hence the "natural slaves" Aristotle describes, who have only their bodies to offer. It's a short route from this conceptual slavery to actual enslavement. What is more relevant now is the impact these assumed inequalities have on the creation and circulation of images of Indigenous peoples. I will argue that this reduction of Indigenous peoples to their mere bodies is what supports the idea that a photograph could tell us much—if not all—outsiders ought to know of these communities. I call this "colonization of media," by which I signify not only that media are among the many venues through which colonization occurs, but more strongly that colonization is an inherently visual phenomenon with major implications for involved media.

In other words, my claim is not that media are just epiphenomena of more "fundamental" colonialism, but rather that media (particularly visual media) are an important way through which colonizers contrasted themselves with the Indigenous peoples over which they exercised control. Through their access to the legitimizing vocation of knowledge production and the veneer of professional expertise, social scientists played a unique role in this story. From the inception of the discipline of sociology in the work of Émile Durkheim,

we see an interest in Indigenous peoples that simultaneously lowers and raises the boundaries between these groups and the Europeans studying them. From the outset of his study of Aboriginal religion in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, it is clear that Durkheim's ultimate focus is on increasing European self-understanding: "whenever we set out to explain something human at a specific moment in time—be it a religious belief, a moral rule, a legal principle, an aesthetic technique, or an economic system—we must begin by going back to its simplest and most primitive form" (Durkheim 1995, 3).

I am not the first to connect the rise of modern media to the documentary function and the myth of the "vanishing Indian." The most relevant previous scholarship on this topic is Brian Hochman's *Savage Preservation*, which argues that "even as the turn-of-the-century project of cultural preservation naturalized primitive races as the 'disappearing objects' of human history, it also established audiovisual media as the permanent records of their remains" (Hochman 2014, xv). In its focus on new media, however, Hochman neglects to explore how these media interact with their older counterparts. This study builds on Hochman's work by considering the role of premodern medium like painting in the development of visual media. With this wider perspective, we can begin to understand how certain media not only came to be associated with Indigenous peoples, but also with the Europeans who sought to study and preserve them themselves.

As works like *Elementary Forms* and *Primitive Classification*, which Durkheim co-wrote with his nephew Marcel Mauss, make clear, early European social scientists treated Indigenous

peoples as if they belonged unchanging cultures outside of time.[3] And while their constituents move through them like fish through water, a specialized external observer can render them comprehensible to an outside (European) audience. This opacity to oneself but transparency to another resonates deeply with one of my main concepts: the self-evident image. I use this term to denote the hypothesis that some, usually lens-based, images escape what I call the "interpretive imperative" to directly transmit their meaning to a viewer without the need for further analysis. While the status of photography as an art has been contested almost since its invention, this debate tends to focus on the assumed (lack of) skill of its practitioners and the mechanical nature of its functioning. As early as 1853, John Leighton of the Photographic Society of London found photographs unable to "elevate the imagination" and "too literal to compete with works of art" (Leighton 1853, 74). As recently as 2014, *The Guardian*'s art critic Jonathan Jones wrote, "Photography is not an art. It is a technology…. My iPad can take panoramic views that are gorgeous to look at. Does that make me an artist? No, it just makes my tablet one hell of a device" (Jones 2014).

Although I don't deny the ways photography has been excluded from the realm of fine art, I suggest an alternate explanation: that the association of photography and other lens-based mediums with the documentary function is what caused this ghettoization, and that this function is most pronounced in the case of images of Indigenous peoples—the same set of stereotypes that turn Indigenous peoples into objects to be studied allowed for the creation and circulation of the self-evident image. While more properly "artistic" mediums like painting

[3] Indeed, this is one of the critiques Sally Price's *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (1989) makes of prevailing museological tendencies in the display of Indigenous art objects, which place them beyond the reach of time and change.

allowed for contemplation of and reflection upon European subjectivity, the lens brought the faraway worlds of Indigenous peoples, encapsulating their cultures in a complete and automatic way that Europeans would presumably not think could apply to their own societies, which were by contrast too complicated and above all *modern* to merit such a reductive treatment.[4] In order to further explore and elucidate these topics, I will focus on three European social scientists, all of whom conducted fieldwork among and made photographs of Indigenous people early on in their careers: Franz Boas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Pierre Bourdieu. By exploring and juxtaposing their approaches to different visual mediums, I hope to clarify the stakes, persistence, and consequences of these beliefs for the trajectories of visual media into the twenty-first century and ongoing processes of colonization around the world.

III. A THOUSAND WORDS

In October 1955, Pierre Bourdieu deployed to an Algeria in the throes of war. Rather than return to France after his service, Bourdieu remained in Algiers as a lecturer. From 1958 to '62, he conducted an ethnography of the Kabyle people, a Berber ethnic group indigenous to the Kabylia region in northern Algeria. This research culminated in his first book, *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, an instant success in France and the basis of Bourdieu's subsequent academic career, mostly notably for his *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, whose subtitle is *précédé de trois*

[4] One excellent example that highlights this contradiction is Krista Thompson's *An Eye for the Tropics* (2007), which examines the role of images in the creation of the tourism industry in Jamaica and the Bahamas from the 1880s to the 1930s. Although these carefully orchestrated images often diverged wildly from reality, the were uncritically and enthusiastically consumed in Britain and elsewhere because they reinforced preconceptions about tropical "island life." The popularity of the images led to efforts to make the countries look more like these images, even depriving its Black population of access to many of its amenities and encouraging them to act like the loyal colonial subjects of these pictures.

études d'ethnologie kabyle. It was in this text that Bourdieu offered his first sustained explication of *habitus*, those "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures," which would be become one of his most successful contributions both in and outside of the discipline (Bourdieu 2002, 72).

Over the past several years, *habitus* has drifted away from something like schema to something like embodiment. In his explication and advocation of his "carnal sociology," Bourdieu protégé Loïc Wacquant asserts that this "brand of immersive fieldwork based on 'performing the phenomenon,' is a fruitful path toward disclosing the cognitive, conative, and cathectic schemata (that is, *habitus*) the generate the practices and underlie the cosmos under investigation" (Wacquant 2015, 2).[5] For Omar Lizardo, this more cognitive account of *habitus* "allows Bourdieu to analyze the social agent as a physical, *embodied* actor, subject to developmental, cognitive and emotive constraints and affected by the very real physical and institutional configurations of the field" (Lizardo 2004, 376 original emphasis). To more fully appreciate this turn to the body, Bourdieusians have increasingly turned to his time in Algeria to better understand its conceptual development, particularly to the many photographs he made among the Kabyle, which were recently gathered into a book which pairs a selection of these pictures with excerpts of Bourdieu's writings on Algeria and the Berbers (Bourdieu 2014). *The Sociological Review* even devoted an entire issue to the subject, in which some argued these photos allowed Bourdieu to "'secure traces' of the traditional Algerian society" and serve "as a kind of externalised memory" (Schultheis, Holder, and Wagner 2009, 45). Or even that

[5] Although Wacquant explicitly uses the word "schema" here, his idea that *habitus* can be approached through an embodied practice pulls it further from a purely rational process.

they could "play a particularly helpful part in the investigation or uncovering of habitus" (Sweetman 2009, 493). Photography, in short, preserved that for which Bourdieu still sought the words. But rather than treating his photographs as aesthetic constructions, these scholars fall into the trope of the self-evident image, whereby meaning is transmitted directly to a viewer without attending to the impact of the medium on that which passes through it.

FIGURE 2: Pierre Bourdieu, R1 (c. 1955–60)

SOURCE: Camera Austria

But let us look at such an image, like the one above of a *hijabi* on a moped. In its juxtaposition of elements of traditional and modern life, it is typical of Bourdieu's work during this period. If one were to speculate on the theoretical utility of Algeria for *habitus*, these sorts of disconnects would provide fertile territory, insofar as "when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 127). From this, it follows that what we ought to seek out analytically are those disconnects between social actor and social environment which by contrast highlight those bodily adaptations unique to a given situation. As should now be clear, it's difficult to square what can only be read as Bourdieu's purposeful and careful compositional choices with the assumption of photography as a self-evident medium capable of "speaking for itself." Indeed, Bourdieu's isolation of this moment invites a certain affective response, for this incongruity is some more (or at least other) than a mere illustration of *habitus*—it's funny, which seems to violate Bourdieu's assumption that photography lacks, as we will explore in greater detail below, its own *raison d'être*. But to comprehend *habitus* more fully we must bring it into conversation with one of its important terminological companions: the field.

Within the sociology of culture, Pierre Bourdieu is perhaps best known for his theory of fields, social spaces within which actors compete with one another for various sorts of capital. Like any "game," a field implies at least a loose agreement on the boundaries of the space and the actors within it. It requires, in other words, a degree of autonomy. But beyond being a mere logical necessity, autonomy is for Bourdieu also a value, and a positive one at that. We can find proof of this negatively, by considering how Bourdieu articulates his distaste

for mediums he believes *lack* autonomy, such as television. In his 1996 monograph on the subject, he claims that "Autonomy is achieved by constructing a sort of 'ivory tower' inside of which people judge, criticize, and even fight each other, but with the appropriate weapons—properly scientific instruments, techniques, and methods" (Bourdieu 1998, 61).

Far from being an isolated or off-the-cuff, Bourdieu continues to hold this opinion, and in much the same terms, years later. During his 1999 course on Manet at the Collège de France, Bourdieu warns "the literary, artistic, legal and political fields are today threatened with loss of autonomy through the hold that television exercises on them" (Bourdieu 2017, 175). And even further, "What in former times happened through acts of state… occurs today especially through the intermediary of television, because television has the power to upset strictly autonomous hierarchies (Bourdieu 2017, 175)." Bourdieu's thinking here strikingly echoes his much earlier work on photography. In his 1965 *Un art moyen*, Bourdieu reasons "The realization of the artistic intention is particularly difficult in photography, probably because… it is only with difficulty that photographic practice can escape the functions to which it owes its existence" (Bourdieu 1990, 71). He goes on to argue that since photography almost always assumes social functions, "its reasons and its *raison d'être* are borrowed from elsewhere" (Bourdieu 1990, 71).[6] Although such an offhand comment could be brushed off in isolation, in context we can begin to appreciate how photography is so easily able to absorb a social function, since its aesthetic function has been ignored.[7]

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[6] cf. R1, a photograph Bourdieu himself made that evokes a certain emotion and thus possesses an agency of its own, rather than needing to borrow its *raison d'être* "from elsewhere" as Bourdieu here describes.

[7] Contrast this with Bourdieu's annoyance of the attribution of social meaning to painting in his Manet lectures at the Collège de France, discussed below.

To understand more fully what Bourdieu means here, it is instructive to compare his treatment of photography with "more demanding cultural activities such as drawing, painting or playing a musical instrument" (Bourdieu 1990, 71). Unlike these mediums, "photography presupposes neither academically communicated culture, nor the apprenticeships and the 'profession' which confer their value on the cultural consumptions and practices ordinarily held to be the most noble, by withholding them from the man in the street" (Bourdieu 1990, 71). But beyond these more proximately "social" reasons, Bourdieu's value judgments surface again. He goes on to write, "the very fact that there barely seems to be any photograph that is untakeable… the hope is that the photograph will be justified by the object photographed, by the choice made in taking the photograph, or in its eventual use," with the consequence that taking a photograph for its own sake is "either useless, perverse or *bourgeois*" (Bourdieu 1990, 78).

The way Bourdieu judges different mediums is important insofar as it has methodological implications for the study of images. As a "social" medium, photography calls for a congruous method; and accordingly, Bourdieu devotes *Un art moyen* to the *use* of photographs rather than these photographs themselves (indeed, the subtitle of the first English translation is "The Social Uses of an Ordinary Art"). For example, Bourdieu asked his interviewees to respond to "photos of fake families… with a man, a woman and children in different situations" and reports that "People wondered about the social or psychological relationships etc., between the characters, and not at all about the structure of the image" (Bourdieu 2017, 214). But in the case of painting, Bourdieu dismisses the avoidance of "formalist, internal readings" as a "materialistic materialism" that "establishes a fairly

straightforward link between a work and its social context" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). Bourdieu aligns himself instead with the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who represents an alternative he describes as "symbolic materialism," which allowed him to understand Manet's true goal of creating "a new value" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). In short, painting offers a properly artistic realm wherein Europeans can contemplate their own experiences whereas the photographs Bourdieu took of the Berbers amidst the Algerian War, and by extension photographs in general, merely provide another form of self-evident data for the social scientist who seeks to fit a culture into a coherent and self-contained whole.

IV. RECONSIDERING CLOUET'S COLLAR

In 2021, the University of Chicago Press published *Wild Thought: A New Translation of "La Pensée sauvage."* The "old" 1966 translation was by Doreen and John Weightman. While described as "execrable" by Clifford Geertz, one thing the Weightman's got correct was the title: *The Savage Mind* (Geertz 1973, 351*n*2). French (tellingly) doesn't have separate words for "savage" and "wild," and hence "wild thought" is a perfectly defensible translation of *la pensée sauvage*. But *sauvage* is pulled closer to "savage" for one important reason: It can function as both adjective and noun. Just as in English, it is possible to say, "a savage" (*un sauvage*) or "a savage person" (*un personne sauvage*)—the word "wild" does not have this dual potential.[8] There's more at stake here than mere pedantry. For what Claude Lévi-Strauss describes in *La Pensée sauvage* is not a modality, type, or species of thought into and out of which one might step (as an adjective might imply), but rather an enclosed system with its own internal

[8] One is led to conclude that the new title has more to do with the negative connotations of the word "savage," though there were also present at the time of Lévi-Strauss's writing, though admittedly in a less pronounced form.

coherence, of equal epistemological weight with any other such system (as a noun might imply).[9]

Perhaps the strongest example of such mutually exclusive ways worldviews in *La Pensée sauvage* is the distinction Lévi-Strauss makes between the engineer and *bricoleur*. Far from designating discrete individuals, these two figures instead embody two oppositional ways to tackle the vicissitudes of life. As he explains them, "The *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each one to the availability of raw materials and tools designed and acquired to fit his project" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 21). As a result, "the *bricoleur*'s set of potentially usable elements cannot be defined by a project," but "is defined solely by its instrumentality or, in other words and to use the bricoleur's own language, by the fact that the elements are collected or kept on the principle that 'this could always come in handy'" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 21). While imbued with a certain sense of creativity, the *bricoleur* is always already boxed in, limited to and by what's at hand, with the result that "his first practical move is retrospective; he must turn back to an already constituted set… inventory or reinventory it; finally… engage in a kind of dialogue with it, in order to identify the responses that the set can offer to his problem" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 22). The engineer, on the other hand, "always seeks to open a way through and situate himself *beyond* the constraints that make up a given state of civilization" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 23).

[9] For a powerful (and early) illustration of this insistence on their equal stature of "primitive" and "civilized" thought, see *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Evans-Pritchard 1976).

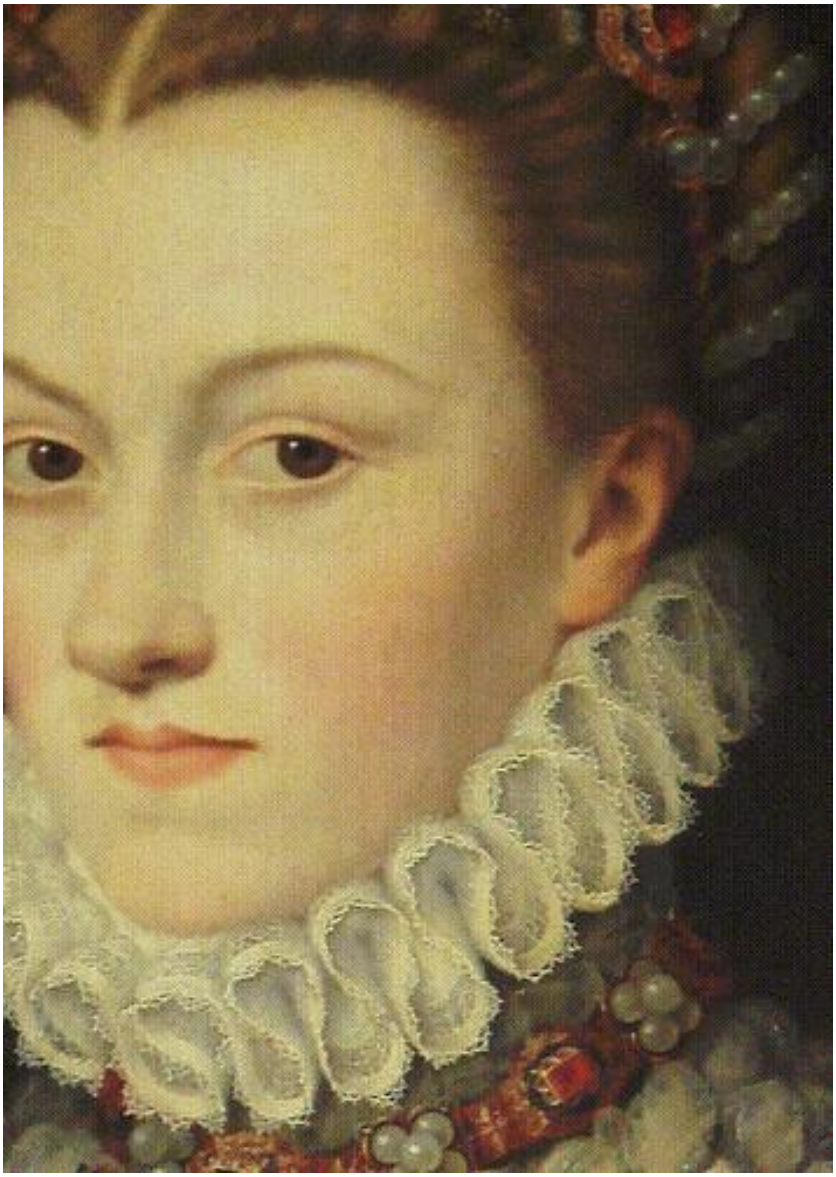

FIGURE 3: François Clouet, detail of *Élisabeth d'Autriche* (c. 1571)

SOURCE: Musée Condé

In frustrating but characteristic fashion, Lévi-Strauss begins to violate these boundaries almost as soon as he erects them, mostly via a lengthy reading of the lace collar in a portrait of Elisabeth of Austria, Queen of France by François Clouet. In his deconstruction of this image, Lévi-Strauss situates the artist between engineer and *bricoleur*, insofar as "with the materials and skills of a craftsman, he fashions a material object that is at the same time an

object of knowledge" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 26). It is a bit difficult to figure out exactly what Lévi-Strauss means here, though the question seems to have to do with size and scale: "Contrary to what happens when we seek to understand a thing or an entity in its real size, with a scale model *the knowledge of the whole precedes that of its parts*" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 28 original emphasis). In other words, the artist shares with the engineer the imagination of the finished product but doesn't necessarily have the engineer's knowledge of how to get from point A to point B; "Even if the scale-model depiction of a lace ruff presupposes… inside knowledge of its morphology and its technique of construction… it cannot be reduced to a diagram or blueprint" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 30). Of course, Lévi-Strauss isn't making claims limited to one particular panel by Clouet and for him it's more generally true that "the starting point [of the work of art] is a set consisting of one or several objects and one or several events, on which aesthetic creation confers a character of wholeness by revealing a common structure" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 31). Lévi-Strauss concludes, "What was provisionally defined… as an event or set of events now appears from a more general angle: the event is but a mode of the contingent, whose integration… into a structure gives rise to aesthetic emotion, and this, *whatever the type of art considered*" (Lévi-Strauss 2021, 33).

We're left with a quite agentive sense of the work of art and its potential; it is an "object of knowledge" that can "reveal a common structure" and "give rise to aesthetic emotion," in which "knowledge of the whole precedes that of its parts." What's more, Lévi-Strauss doesn't limit his argument to a certain medium, period, style, or really any qualifying criteria whatsoever; through the brief contemplation of one collar in one portrait by one painter completed at some point in the late sixteenth century, we've stumbled upon the great and

unchanging nature of art.[10] But if we shift focus slightly to consider Lévi-Strauss's own aesthetic output, the story changes radically. Regarding his field photographs, "Lévi-Strauss never claimed that images could speak independently of one's ethnography and reveal an individual's psychological traits" (Fiorini 2008). How might we explain these wildly divergent opinions on the powers and abilities of the image in different media? Through the application of concepts like the self-evident image and the documentary function of photography, we can again begin to see how painting and its European subject are elevated over photography and its Indigenous subject, with deep consequences on both European understandings of media, culture, and the deeper penetration of colonization across the globe.

V. BUT ANOTHER TOOL

The evening before leaving to begin his work with the Baffinland Eskimo in what is now the Canadian territory of Nunavut, Franz Boas listed his "armamentarium" thusly: "three watches… a geodetic theodolite… a large compass, barometer, thermometer, hygrometer, aneroid and a photographic apparatus" (Boas 1883.)[11] Here, a camera is listed alongside specialized devices designed to measure distance, angle, direction, and humidity, as if it were but another tool, as if the visual were but another register to be marshalled in Boas's quest to "amass as many data points as possible" since he "always believed that a scientific student could not base an analysis on a description or representation taken a single place and time by

[10] On the topic of Europeans making grandiose claims about the nature of art based on one (arguably unextraordinary) painting, it's difficult not to think of the extended treatment of *A Pair of Shoes* (1885) by Vincent van Gogh in Martin Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art* (Heidegger 2008).

[11] Though it has largely fallen out of favor, I continue to use the word "Eskimo" here rather than the more specific Inuit or Yupik endonyms since it was the preferred term at the time of Boas.

a single individual, in a single medium" (Jacknis 1984, 19, 45).[12] At times, Boas even seems determined to fold reality itself into this photographs, such as by taking "a shot every few feet, allowing one to reconstruct the appearance of [a] whole space in a much more systematic fashion" (Jacknis 1984, 9). It's difficult to ignore across his many photographs the sense of a social scientist struggling to settle upon a uniform, reproducible, and above all "objective" way to gather visual data, reminiscent of juridical uses of photography like the mug shot. In fact, many of Boas's portraits of the Nakwoktak were made in the jails and prisons of Victoria, where many Indigenous people were kept; "these photographs strove for a close-up and standardized exposure, fully and evenly lit and clearly focused. The goal was maximum information of surface features, not the expression of the sitter's character or the photographer's vision" (Jacknis 1984, 19). It was against this "'objective' nature of the environment" which "he would contrast the Eskimos' perceptions" (Jacknis 1984, 4). All the same, Boas doesn't grant any special status to photography, instead speaking of it in rather utilitarian terms: "It would also be well to have photographs for showing the fish as it is being cut, because it is very difficult to understand some of the descriptions of the cutting without illustrations" (Boas 1932).

Boas's choice of Oregon Hastings as a photographer also reflected his concern with scholarly disinterest. In terms of his visual style, Hastings was "in the documentary rather than the art tradition of photography" (Jacknis 1984, 11). Like other British Columbian commercial photographers, Hastings's "studio experience in mid-Victorian times led them to produce a

[12] This section draws heavily on this article, an exhaustive overview of Boas's use of photography throughout his career.

'good' photograph—well composed, focused, and exposed," which "were the qualities demanded by their sitters and government sponsors" (Jacknis 1984, 11). Thus, one is led to conclude that "Hasting's main aim was the recording of the subject matter, not the construction of striking visual patterns"—a conclusion that assumes it is possible to so cleanly cleave form from content (Jacknis 1984, 12). By surveying the entire corpus of Boas and Hastings, we can ascertain that they "systematically covered the space in at least three ways: from opposing directions; from father away and nearby, in the same direction; and from multiple directions, as from the perimeter of a square directed toward the central area" (Jacknis 1984, 30).

And yet, Boas frequently used his camera for purposes we could only describe as sentimental, such as "taking pictures of his cabin for his wife and having his servant Wilhelm take a picture of him" (Jacknis 1984, 4). Boas even kept photos of informants like "[George] Hunt and the Chinook Charlie Cultee" (Jacknis 1984, 31). This tactic also bleeds into Boas's attitude toward his subject matter. Although Boas relied upon photography to capture "otherwise noncollectable architecture and monumental sculpture," he also created images "conveying little ethnographic information," such as one wherein a Nakwoktak mother "wrapped in a blanket, sits with her baby on the grass, smiling at the camera" (Jacknis 1984, 5, 18). Boas even on occasion gave these photographs "arty" titles like "Waiting for the Canoe" (Jacknis 1984, 16). In his personal life, Boas was also susceptible to the emotional power of photographs, such that "he carried within him portraits of his wife and children, and when he lost of the pictures from a medallion be carried he was quite distraught" (Jacknis 1984, 32).

Boas's sentimentality also carried over into his research subjects themselves and motivated him "to give the Kwakiutl pictures of themselves" (Jacknis 1984, 16).

The tension between photographs as evidence and mementos is not the only ambivalence characterizing Boas's treatment of the medium. For present purposes, what is more illuminating is the contrast between Boas's willingness to intervene in and even "construct" his images and his desire to represent Indigenous societies in their "pure" forms. In short, "his desire to obtain adequate material… ran against native cultural contexts, which meant [Boas] would have to actively arrange matters" (Jacknis 1984, 14). At one point, he even rescheduled a photo shoot "possibly because it took Boas some time to gather the requisite props and arrange for an 'actor'" (Jacknis 1984, 29). It is important to underscore that regardless of how we might feel about these interventions, they is nothing underhanded or self-contradictory about them within Boas's system; "Boas was not opposed to reconstruction on principle, as long as it was done correctly, by natives, and was so labeled" (Jacknis 1984, 48). At the same time, "nowhere in Boas's photographic work can one find acculturated artifacts as an explicit subject," thus betraying Boas's predilection towards "pre-contact" Indigenous societies, unsullied by exposure to Western influence (Jacknis 1984, 48). In short, Boas "used both commission and omission to portray the Kwakiutl visual past—by arranging those aspects of the culture that he did want and by avoiding those aspects before his camera that he did not want" (Jacknis 1984, 47).

While these conflicts played out within what we might consider Boas's narrowly academic work, his photographs also raised for him larger questions about audience and what Boas calls "popularization." In his own words, "These pictures have given me the idea of

writing a popular, or maybe a semi-popular book on this part of the country" (Rohner 1969, 183). Attempting to explain Boas's thinking, Ira Jacknis suggests that "he realized that, for the general public, striking visual images that *appeared to speak for themselves* were more appealing than a lengthy text full of complexities and qualifications" (Jacknis 1984, 32 emphasis added). Using my framework, we can offer an alternative explanation that links the popularization Boas envisions rather with the self-evident image and its concomitant affiliation with Indigenous peoples, whose culture is written on their bodies unlike the cerebral world of the Europeans. Indeed, Boas believed "a culture was imprinted on the very movements of a person" (Jacknis 1984, 42).[13]

[13] To be sure, Boas might also have employed such an embodied approach to the study of Western cultures, but the very fact that he devoted himself so wholeheartedly to Indigenous peoples is symptomatic of this conceptual elision.

FIGURE 4: Franz Boas, "Hamatsa Coming Out of Secret Room" (1895)

SOURCE: National Museum of Natural History

Given his dogged belief in the physical embodiment of culture, it is unsurprising that Boas should incorporate that medium which is coextensive with the body: performance. Coincidentally, Boas's performative practice was showcased in the most recent documenta, one of the world's most important exhibitions of contemporary art. In this documentation,

Boas "is shown posing for a diorama of the Hamat'sa ceremony for the then U.S. National Museum (part of the Smithsonian Institution)—a ceremony that is still important to the Kwakwaka'wakw community in Canada" (documenta 2017). Ironic for someone so invested in physicality, Boas held performance in comparatively low regard. While conducting research in preparation for mounting his renown museum displays, Boas always preferred to rely on photographs of "natives in the field" (Jacknis 1984, 33). In the absence of such referents, "natives were invited back to the museums to review the collections" (Jacknis 1984, 33). When "no natives were available, either in the field or at the museum," however, "the anthropologist who had witnessed the activities in question posed for the model-makers, often in native costume" (Jacknis 1984, 33). Although the last bit might offend some of our contemporary sensibilities, living as we are in the age of cultural appropriation, we might instead see this last option as the one that brings the exoticizing barrier between researcher and researched to its lowest point.[14] No longer is the social scientist shielded by the lens, but a direct participant in the cultural life of people. In this way, I propose an inversion of the Boasian mediatic pyramid, such that performance would occupy a higher position than photography insofar as it escapes the lure of the self-evident image and forcing us to come to terms with what a culture means rather than engaging in an Otherizing voyeurism.

VI. DISCIPLINE-COLORED GLASSES

[14] Though obvious, it's worth noting Boas's (near) nudity here, or at least decidedly "neutral" dress, as though he were communicating some knowledge deeper than a superficial costume could offer.

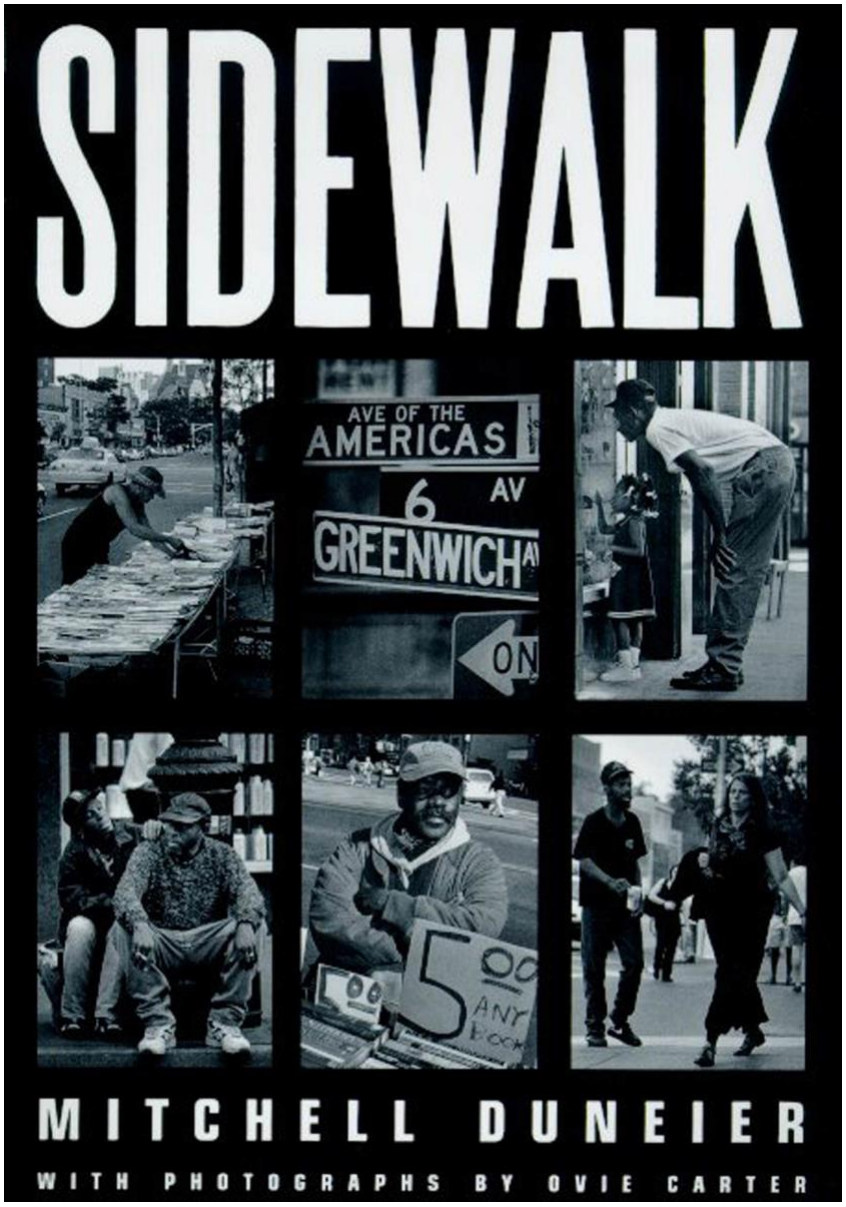

FIGURE 5: Mitchell Duneier and Ovie Carter, *Sidewalk* (2000)

SOURCE: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

For his critically acclaimed and best-selling *Sidewalk*, Mitchell Duneier partnered with Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Ovie Carter. While Duneier goes into near exhaustive detail about these predominantly Black men who sell magazines and books on the eponymous sidewalks of Greenwich Village, scrutinizing their daily habits, life histories, and even the ways

they engage with passersby, Carter's photographs are peppered throughout the text with no comment, as if their meaning was obvious and clear to any viewer. Why does an ethnographer as careful as Duneier nevertheless succumb to the lure of the self-evident image? To be fair, Duneier is far from alone in this tendency. Perhaps part of the blame goes to the siloization of the contemporary academy, wherein insights that are common to some are unable to hop the fence into nearby fields. In other words, what Duneier and those like him assume is that images, at least those created with lenses, occupy some other realm beyond the reach of the social.

For those social scientists more proximate to media studies, however, such a position is untenable. Consider the case of Stuart Hall, founding father of what has come to be known as the Birmingham School of cultural studies. In his introduction to the edited volume *Visual Culture*, Hall specifies how the subject is "formed subjectively through what and how it 'sees', how its 'field of vision" is constructed" and how what is seen is "not eternally fixed, but relative to and implicated in the positions and schemas of interpretation which are brought to bear upon it" (Hall 1999, 310). Of course, this doesn't mean an encounter between viewer and viewed is a veritable free-for-all. On the contrary, "Visual discourses already have possible positions of interpretation… embedded in them" to which "subjects bring their own subjective desires and capacities to the 'text' which enable them to take up positions of identification in relation to its meaning" (Hall 1999, 310). With such a model in mind, it's easy to see how some of these matchups become worn through use like trails through the woods,

such that we come to rely upon them and even see them as natural. I contend the self-evident image is one such path.[15]

To return to Hall, "Culture… is not so much a set of things—novels and paintings or TV programmes or comics—as a process, a set of practices," which "is concerned with the production and exchange of meanings—the 'giving and taking of meaning'—between the members of a society of group" (Hall 1997, 2). Culture thus "depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways" (Hall 1997, 2). To adapt these points to present purposes, Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss, and Boas are not isolated instances, but symptoms of much broader currents both within and outside of the academy. And like my discussion of Duneier above, the oversights and assumptions of brilliant figures are especially instructive, insofar as they can often bring us straight to the heart of matters (not to mention the status of these three as pivotal figures of intellectual history).

More topically, this dissertation contributes to ongoing efforts within visual sociology to resist, in Michael Guggenheim's words, "asymmetric media-determinism" and "misleading notion[s] of objectivity" (Guggenheim 2015, 345). While Guggenheim's "translation" metaphor to describe how objects of knowledge move between mediums is helpful and his observation that different academic disciplines have had propensities towards different types of translations is correct, he does not himself offer an explanation as to why this should be

[15] Far from making images "off limits," this approach makes them available for investigation: "Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have 'one, true meaning'… work in this area is bound to be interpretive—a debate between, not who is 'right' and who is 'wrong', but between equally plausible… meanings and interpretations" (Hall 1997, 9).

the case. By returning to earlier historical moments in the forms of Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss, and Boas, I offer such an explanation by finding a link between two processes that might seem unrelated at first glance: the idea that certain mediums are more self-evident or objective than others and the unequal encounters between European and Indigenous peoples over the course of now several centuries.

CHAPTER TWO:

PIERRE BOURDIEU AND THE AUTONOMOUS IMAGE

I. THE END OF AN EMPIRE

FIGURE 6: Pierre Bourdieu, 126-12-4-N

SOURCE: Camera Austria

You are on the Mediterranean Sea. The sun is harsh overhead and makes blinding coins of light on the crests of the lapping waves. The ocean stretches out to meet the sky in every

direction, enclosing you in a blue marble. Suddenly, a ripple disturbs the horizon, perhaps a mirage or trick of the eye. But as you glide across the water it gradually comes into focus: land. You make out a quay, and then another, and then a bay opens between them, small at first but steadily growing, until these two ends are linked by a crescent of sand. The first buildings appear modern, not much taller than the shore they crowd like eager children. But above these rises a city of white, clung to the sides of a steep hill. The buildings gleam brilliantly, as if lit from within. Atop it all is an ancient citadel, nestled in the skyline like a crown jewel.

This is a scene that might have greeted the young Pierre Bourdieu when he arrived in Algiers during the autumn of 1955. French rule had begun with the invasion of the city in 1830 and had become an integral part of the country by 1848. The year before his arrival, the National Liberation Front (FLN) had attacked 70 targets, including police, military, and the *Pied-Noir*, those of European descent born in Algeria. *Toussaint Rouge* ("Red All Saints' Day"), as it would become to be called, marked the outbreak of the open hostilities between nationalist militants and their colonial overlords that would rage until 1962.[1]

Before the war, the likely largest change in Bourdieu's life was when this son of a postman moved from Pau near the Spanish border to Paris to study at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, largely considered the best secondary school in France, and then at the École normale supérieure (ENS), the most prestigious of the *grandes écoles* that dominate French intellectual life to this day.[2] Despite his coming renown as a sociologist, Bourdieu studied with famed

[1] So named due to its occurrence on November 1.

[2] The French education system is at once highly centralized and complex. *Lycée* is roughly equivalent to high schools in the US and culminates with the *baccalauréat*, after which students can either pursue postsecondary studies or begin their professional lives. While public universities are open enrollment, the elite *grandes écoles* only admit students through a

Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, eventually passing the *agrégation*, another national exam that allows one to teach within the French public education system.

After only a year at a *lycée* in Moulins, Bourdieu received his conscription. Allegedly wanting to stay alongside those with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, Bourdieu chose not to attend a military academy like many of his ENS classmates, spending this time as a guard and clerk (Silverstein and Goodman 2009, 8–9). But rather than returning to France after completing his service, Bourdieu stayed in Algiers as a lecturer (Johnson 2002). It was during this time that Bourdieu began to drift toward the social scientific work for which he would become famous, beginning with his ethnographic research among the Kabyle people, a prominent group among the Berbers, an ethnic category describing the speakers of several closely related languages Indigenous to North Africa (Brett and Fentress 1997).

The Kabyle are named for their homeland Kabylia, sandwiched between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlas Mountains. Like much of the region, Kabylia has changed hands frequently throughout its history. An early conqueror was the Carthaginians in what is now neighboring Tunisia, who by 600 BCE had established multiple settlements in the area. The Punic Wars (264 –146 BCE), however, crippled Carthage and allowed the Berbers to re-exert their influence (Spielvogel 2014, 156). Over the next several centuries, this strip of North Africa would be annexed by the Romans in 24 CE, followed by the Vandals in 435, and shortly thereafter by the Byzantine Empire (Day 2001, 43–44). Despite these upheavals, the Kabyle were largely able to retain their independence (Wysner 1945). Even the blistering advance of

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national exam for which most complete a two-year preparatory program. The *écoles normales supérieures* are a group of specialized *grandes écoles* that prepared graduates for careers in government and academia.

the Arabs across Northwest Africa following the death of Muhammad in 632 CE was unable to penetrate the mountains among which the Kabyle dwelt.[3] Although the Spanish made sizable advances during the early 16th century, it was ultimately the Ottomans who dominated Algeria from 1516 to 1830. It is unsurprising, then, that Kabylia successfully resisted French rule until the Battle of Icheriden in 1857 (Darmon 2009, 271). Sporadic resistance would continue until the Mokrani Revolt of 1871 (Droz 2009).

Throughout the Algerian War, Kabylia remained stubbornly committed to nationalism, producing pivotal FLN leaders such as Abane Ramdane (1920–1957), Krim Belkacem (1922–1970), and Hocine Aït Ahmed (1926–2015), a recalcitrance that made it a key target of French counterinsurgency. For this reason, the Kabyle provide an ideal case of what Bourdieu and co-author Abdelmalek Sayad would later describe as "uprooting" (Bourdieu and Sayad 2020). Indeed, this period of Bourdieu's life provided the source material for *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (Bourdieu 1958). This first monograph was an overnight success in France and was translated into English four years later. By 1960, Bourdieu had returned to the University of Paris, his star already on the rise. Far from being a youthful concern, Bourdieu would circle back to his Algerian fieldwork throughout his writings, perhaps most notably in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu 1972). And mostly notably for present purposes, Bourdieu made well over 1,000 photographs in Algeria between 1958 and 1961. It is to these images and his purported reasons for creating them that we now turn.

II. ALGIERS, THE WHITE

[3] Cf. the mountainous Zomia region of Southwest Asia James Scott analyzes in his "anarchist history," *The Art of Not Being Governed* (Scott 2010).

On 26 June 2001, German sociologist Franz Schultheis interviewed Pierre Bourdieu at the Collège de France. For the past year, Schultheis and Bourdieu had been engaged in a project with Camera Austria, a gallery in Graz to which Bourdieu would bequeath an archive of photographs made in Algeria between 1958 and 1961. Perhaps due to his familiarity with Schultheis or the relaxed format of an interview as opposed to academic prose, Bourdieu sounds less guarded than usual, allowing us to examine some of the joints of his thought. One of these key moments is the tension that between photography as science and photography as art. Coming of age during the beginning of widespread availability of commercial photography, Bourdieu remarks how "photography is the only practice with an artistic dimension that is accessible to everyone, and at the same time it is the only cultural asset that everyone consumes" (Bourdieu 2014, 25). As will become clear in the aptly titled *Un art moyen*, a key criterion for aesthetic value for Bourdieu is exclusivity.

In this way, the artist Bourdieu imagines is strikingly like an academic. And as if he regards his photographic practice as potentially disqualifying, Bourdieu is quick to reassert his intellectualism. With surprising candor, he worries how "having to be sufficiently serious and scientific induced me to withdraw myself to a great extent with regard to the literary side of my work" (Bourdieu 2014, 30). Though scholars of rhetoric might object to the drawing of a strict line between the literary and argumentative, social pressures clearly exert force in ways that are often irrational, especially in spaces as cloistered as the academy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Differentiating himself from "professional photographers" as well, Bourdieu noted how they "did a lot of things I would not have done, things that just looked painterly. I think… it was not easy for them to take an unconventional view of this society, a view that was not

exclusively picturesque by design: a weaver at work, a woman coming home from the well" (Bourdieu 2014, 28).[4] The invocation of painting here is far from coincidental, as for Bourdieu it represents art par excellence. While photography is barred from art due to its documentary function, painting best embodies the 19th-century slogan *l'art pour l'art* (Gautier 1835).

Were there any doubt about his belief in the documentary function of photographs, it's removed when Bourdieu describes how he uses them: "The photos, which you can look at again and again at leisure, like sound recordings you can listen to again and again… allow you to discover details that escaped you at first glance or that you cannot examine at depth during an interview for reasons of discretion" (Bourdieu 2014, 33).[5] Of course, this mnemonic function only works if these images are accurate representations of reality rather than mere "interpretations" of it. By thus denying the aesthetic autonomy of photography (i.e., its ability to comment on reality rather than merely reflecting it), this argument transfers any critical function that images might serve to "properly" artistic mediums such as painting.

[4] Note Bourdieu's boundary-work here (Lamont and Molnar 2002).
[5] The invention of the wax cylinder around the same time as the diffusion of photographic technologies extends the documentary function into the realm of sound in a way that is slightly outside the purview of this dissertation (Hochman 2014).

FIGURE 7: Photo array 1

SOURCE: Camera Austria

Insistent as he was on the embodied character of culture norms and behaviors that he would famously term *habitus*, it would behoove us to analyze Bourdieu's own physicality and

comportment as a photographer.[6] Again Bourdieu remains adamant that even though he "was very moved by and sensitive to the suffering of the people," he "had the detachment of an observer, as manifested by the fact [he] was taking photos" (Bourdieu 2014, 13). Though Bourdieu is clearly speaking metaphorically here, there is also a very literal way in which he enacts this orientation physically. Consider his claim that "Photography… is a manifestation of the *distance* of the observer, who collects his [*sic*] data and is always aware that he [*sic*] is collecting data" (Bourdieu 2014, 32 emphasis added). If we turn now to Bourdieu's photographs with this in mind, several qualities come into sharp relief. In the first array, we can observe how Bourdieu time and again seeks out an elevated position, from which he can encompass the totality of a landscape, as though seeing it from Archimedean point outside the field of social relations.[7] Indeed, one of the other chief Bourdieusian contributions to social theory is that of the field. In an interview with student Loïc Wacquant, Bourdieu describes a field as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions," which are "objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation… in the structure of the distribution of species of power" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). The recurrence of the adjective "objective" in his response underscores how important it is to him that there is a "correct" way to conduct social scientific research, and that he is its chief example.

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[6] Again, Bourdieu describes *habitus* as "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu 2002, 72).
[7] My approach here is called formal analysis; a method one which will likely be unfamiliar to sociologists, but which is quite commonplace within disciplines like art history. In his *Short Guide to Writing About Art*, literary critic Sylvan Barnet describes formal analysis as the "analysis of the form the artist produces; that is, an analysis of the work of art, which is made up of such things as line, shape, color, texture, mass, composition" (Barnet 2005, 100).

FIGURE 8: Photo array 2

SOURCE: Camera Austria

There is something unnatural about these images; not so much in their (admittedly quite ordinary) content, but in their composition. This is not the normal angle at which one

would encounter such structures. Buildings, to be sure, are explicitly intended for human use and occupation, which are possible because they are larger than us. And yet, Bourdieu floats over these scenes like some invisible architect, or even a god. The predilection for shooting on the bias highlights Bourdieu's attempt to fit as much visual information into the frame as possible. Given the huge number of images created, it is not as if all display this tendency. There are many instances in which Bourdieu is at the same level of elevation as the scene, as in the second array. But even these cases evoke a sense of distance and remove, albeit one which is accomplished horizontally rather than vertically. By seeking out a wide angle, Bourdieu again seeks out a privileged position at which one can get a sense of the whole, of the subject embedded in its context just as social actors are situated within a field.

Although Bourdieu is often vaunted as a decolonial thinker, his photographs seem to reproduce some of the very tendencies he critiques (Go 2013; Steinmetz 2023). In *Sociologie de l'Algérie*, for example, Bourdieu writes how

> the colonist, with his techniques, his different attitude to the land—his way of looking on it as a mere raw material—and the surveyor, with his introduction of the notion of property limits, have brought about a transmutation of values and the collapse of the former agencies which mediated the relationship between the peasant and his land (Bourdieu 1962, 138).

Nevertheless, one might argue that his photographs reveal a Bourdieu who has fallen prey to a similar tactic; namely, a reliance on (images of) people for the creation of social theory. It is important, though, not to overstate this point. Bourdieu was deeply invested in ending of French rule in Algeria and the support of Algerian scholars, even receiving a contribution from Edward Said at his memorial (Bourdieu and Sayad 2020; Said 2002). And even if Bourdieu did view the Algerians and especially the Berbers as a source of data, it would be perverse to

suggest that this rises to the ethical or political level of the very material atrocities France committed during this period, many of which are only just beginning to come to light (Manceron and Morin 2021). Nor are Bourdieu's photographs necessarily exploitative, voyeuristic, or otherwise problematic. What is at stake here is not so much the *content* of these image as much as their *form*.[8] By visually situating himself apart from and at times even literally above his subjects, Bourdieu falls into well-worn European tropes of centering oneself when interacting with "Others."[9] Beyond this rather tepid claim, however, is the more important one that the association of the medium of photography with the supposed simplicity of Berber society can explain Bourdieu's treatment of photographs as "self-evident" data capable of communicating their meaning without the need for interpretation or analysis.

III. POOR, POOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Bourdieu had a difficult time shaking his interest in photography. After his "Algeria publications" and his the first of his co-authored studies with Jean-Claude Passeron on the French educational system, the next substantial research project Bourdieu devotes himself to is *Un art moyen*, translated alternately as *Photography: The Social Uses of an Ordinary Art* and *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. In contrast to the more nuanced view he would explore in conversation with Franz Schultheis, this Bourdieu has a remarkably simple view of the

[8] The distinction between form and content is a common one within the humanities (Robertson 1967).

[9] Although it has a relatively specific meaning in philosophical contexts, the Other has been "used by other European thinkers in a broader sense" to signify that which "cannot be encapsulated within the thought-forms of Western philosophy without reducing the alterity of the Other" (Bernasconi 2005, 673).

medium. Differentiating it with the "more demanding" drawing and painting, Bourdieu asserts,

> photography presupposes neither academically communicated culture, nor the apprenticeships and the 'profession' which confer their value on the cultural consumptions and practices ordinarily held to be the most noble, by withholding them from the man in the street (Bourdieu 1998, 5).

Rather than judge the aesthetic value of the medium on its actual visual capabilities, Bourdieu reduces photography to its assumed position within social space, though tellingly Bourdieu does not offer much evidence to defend this point. Perhaps it is true that at least at this time in place photography did not possess an "academically communicated culture" (though it is not immediately clear what Bourdieu means by this), but the claim that photography possesses neither "apprenticeships" nor a "profession" betrays a lack of familiarity with the actual practice of photography.

Continuing to oppose photography to "fully consecrated" mediums like painting and music, Bourdieu stresses its near universal accessibility and appeal. He writes, "photographic practice is considered accessible to everyone… and those involved in it do not feel they are being measured against an explicit and codified system defining legitimate practice in terms of its objects, its occasions and its modalities" (Bourdieu 1998, 7). For someone purportedly as concerned as Bourdieu is with analytic rigor, this style of argumentation is quite foreign. Indeed, Bourdieu insists in his more strictly methodological *The Craft of Sociology* that the social sciences must pursue a break with "folk concepts" analogous to that of the natural sciences, in order that such an "epistemological break that can separate scientific interpretation from all

artificialist or anthropomorphic interpretations of the functioning of society" (Bourdieu 1999, 23).[10] To such a scholar, basing an argument on "is considered" seems risky at best.

To his credit, it is not as if Bourdieu regards photography as worthless or without merit, just that its value lies in realm of sociology rather than art. Photography is for Bourdieu a mirror reflecting social reality, such that "the analysis of the subjective or objective meaning that subjects confer on photography as a practice or as a cultural work appears as a privileged means of apprehending… the aesthetics (and ethics) of different groups or classes" (Bourdieu 1998, 7). Bourdieu is nothing if not internally consistent, and the analysis he conducts follows with perfect logic from these presuppositions; if the photograph is merely a tool to elicit response, the blended interview/experiment model Bourdieu pursues in *Un art moyen* becomes entirely appropriate. As deeply embedded as he is in social scientific discourse, it is unsurprising then how Bourdieu proclaims this controversial position as if it were a truism: "It is natural that photography should be the object of a reading that may be called sociological, and that it should never be considered in or for itself, in terms of its technical or aesthetic qualities" (Bourdieu 1998, 22). Like all academics (and perhaps all workers), Bourdieu is afflicted by a certain *déformation professionnelle*. In this way, Bourdieu's great accomplishment is also his great weakness. Even as Bourdieu opened entire areas such as art and literature believed opaque to social analysis, by so doing he opens himself up to the critiques of the

[10] This attempt to carve out a unique and exclusive domain for sociological research is a recurring one, stretching back to debates between Émile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde at its inception (Tarde 2010).

disciplines that have long studied these fields, and which often have very different ideas about how cultural products should be approached.[11]

Although written almost 15 years before *Distinction*, *Un art moyen* anticipates several of its arguments; namely, that the process of aesthetic judgment is at its root an act of social positioning (Bourdieu 1984). Indeed, *moyen* can also mean "middle-class" or "average." It is this intermediary quality of photography with the "hierarchy of legitimacies" that Bourdieu emphasizes, "half-way between 'vulgar' practices, apparently abandoned to the anarchy of tastes and noble cultural practices, subject to strict rules, explains, as we have seen, the ambiguity of the attitudes which it provokes" (Bourdieu 1998, 97). Accordingly, photography is very useful to Bourdieu insofar as "boundary work" involves distinguishing oneself from both those regarded to be of lower status as well as those regarded higher (Lamont 1992).[12]

> To differentiate photographers from the artists he deeply respects, Bourdieu notes how
>
> > there barely seems to be any photograph that is untakeable, or even one which does not already seem to exist in a virtual state… the hope is that the photograph will be justified by the object photographed, by the choice made in taking the photograph, or in its eventual use, which rules out the idea of taking a photograph simply in order to take a photograph as either useless, perverse or *bourgeois* (Bourdieu 1998, 78).

Again, Bourdieu seems blissfully unaware of the types of work and conversation that had characterized photography for years before the appearance of *Un art moyen*. Take the example

[11] In his Manet lectures, Bourdieu explains, "When I say… that 'we should create a science of works of art', know that my statement will be felt as a provocation and that this is already a solecism in so far as it is tacitly understood that there is no science of art and that even the ambition to create a science of this thing that is beyond all science, beyond everything, constitutes a sign of positivism—this is always an insult—of scientism and of philistinism" (Bourdieu 2017, 54).

[12] Cf. Sigmund Freud's "narcissism of minor differences" (Freud 2005, 108).

of Swiss-US photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank, who became famous through his project *The Americans*, originally published in France during 1958.[13] Frank was initially published by *Camera* editor Walter Laubli alongside fellow Swiss photographer Jakob Tuggener, whose poetically sequenced photo book without text *Fabrik* (1943) offered Frank a model for *The Americans*. Finding further inspiration in Bill Brandt's *The English at Home* (1936) and Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938), Frank secured a Guggenheim Fellowship, which he used to travel across the US in 1955 and photograph all strata of society. Over the next two years, Frank would make 28,000 pictures, of which only 83 would be included in *The Americans*. In *The Guardian*, photography critic Sean O'Hagan describes how "Frank set out with his Guggenheim Grant to do something new and unconstrained by commercial diktats," to "photograph America as it unfolded before his somewhat sombre outsider's eye" (O'Hagan 2014). In this way, Frank "defined himself against the traditional *Life* magazine school of romantic reportage" (O'Hagan 2014).

[13] While I admittedly have no concrete evidence Bourdieu was familiar with Frank's work, given its timing, location, and subject matter, it is unlikely that Bourdieu would not have encountered it. Even if he weren't, however, Frank is but a single example of more widespread stylistic tendencies within the practice of art photography during this period.

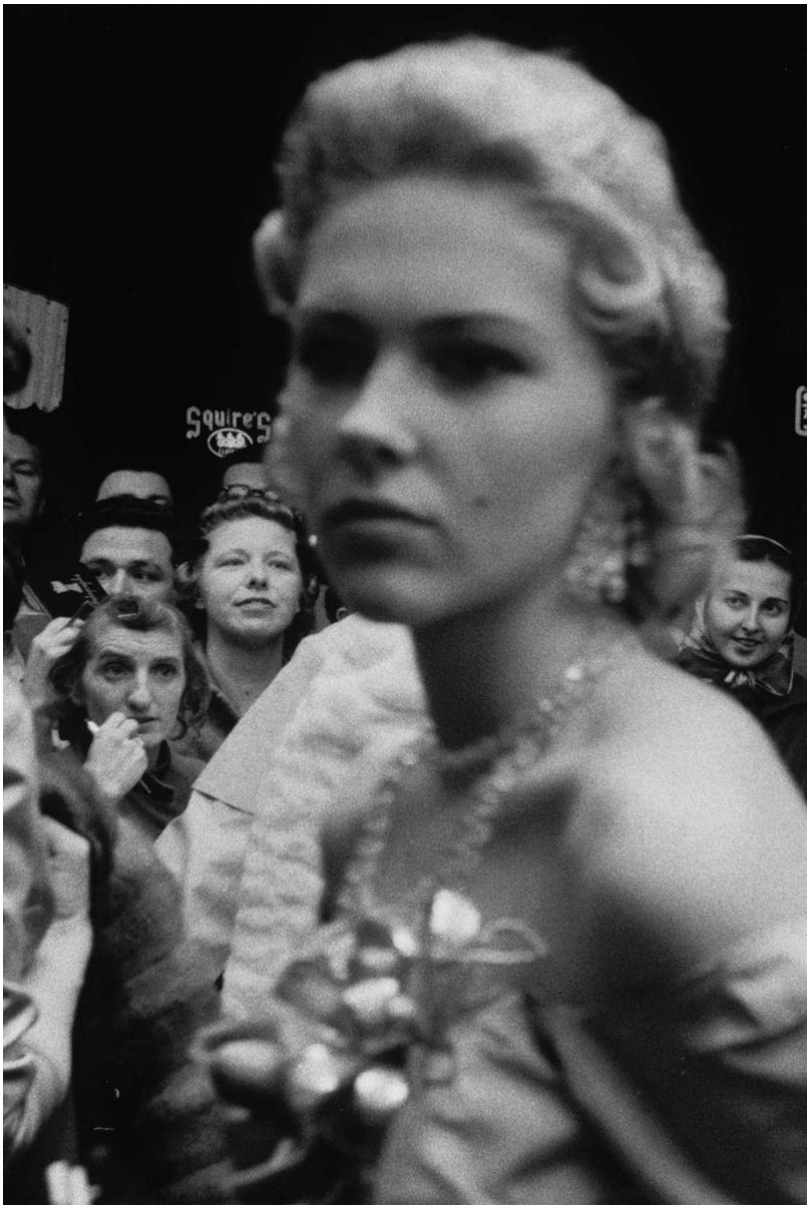

FIGURE 9: Robert Frank, *Star, Hollywood* (1956)

SOURCE: Minneapolis Institute of Art

Consider the above image from *The Americans*, entitled *Star, Hollywood*. In terms of space, the lion's share of the frame is occupied by the titular movie star. The actress, however, is out of focus. Even the woman's expression is unexpected; the eyes in shadow and the corners of the mouth slightly downturned, rather than pinned up in the permanent smile of

the one who knows they're before the camera. In contrast to her blurred profile, three women in the crowd appear in sharp relief. Their expressions range from admiration to expectation to anxiety, in marked contrast to the starlet's blank expression. Unlike the tabloid photojournalist who seeks to glamorize and elevate celebrities, Frank's tone here feels critical, or at least realistic; situating the starlet as but one individual among others, not necessarily capable of supporting the emotions projected upon her. Given this at least potentially critical orientation, much of the early reaction to *The Americans* was in understandable fashion decidedly negative. The editors of *Popular Photography* called the publication "meaningless blur, grain, muddy exposures, drunken horizons and general sloppiness" and derided Frank as "a joyless man who hates the country of his adoption" (Goldsmith 1960; Downes 1960). For others, however, Frank's criticality was the point. In his introduction, Jack Kerouac describes how Frank "with one hand… sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film" (Kerouac 1969, vi).

In any case, this excursus has demonstrated the insufficiency of Bourdieu's approach. Contra his assertions, it is difficult to understand Frank's work without recourse to aesthetics. While we might explain Bourdieu's ignorance in this area as due to his disciplinary training as a social scientist, other sociologists have produced more careful and nuanced readings of Frank. For example, Howard Becker compares him to such luminaries of social analysis as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and even Alexis de Tocqueville. Becker describes how "Frank presents photographs made in scattered places around the country, returning again and again to such themes as the flag, the automobile, race, restaurants," which he eventually turns "by the weight of the associations in which he embeds them, into profound and meaningful

symbols of American culture" (Becker 1974, 9). Thusly, Becker recognizes and respects the potential aesthetic autonomy of photography in a way Bourdieu does not.

By depriving photography of artistic status so totally, Bourdieu creates a framework unable to accommodate an image like *Star, Hollywood*, even as he opens new possibilities for the social analysis of photographs. Though this case is but a single example, the problems it highlights have wider significance for Bourdieu's argument. For instance, such an understanding of photography influences Bourdieu's approach to other mediums: "a photograph, even a figurative one, is rejected when no function can immediately be assigned to it, just as non-figurative paintings are refused when they do not show an identifiable object, that is, when they do not suggest any resemblance to familiar forms" (Bourdieu 1998, 91). Though it is certainly true that *some* viewers might have such an orientation (maybe even most of his sample), Bourdieu overplays his hand by raising this tendency to the level of a rule.[14] And this is far from the only instance of Bourdieu collapsing two registers many scholars of art and media would likely separate. To take another example, Bourdieu argues, "While painting encourages a demand for realism, photography, which always and automatically appears realistic and therefore achieves no special merit by being so, inclines the viewer to expect conformity to a formulable intention" (Bourdieu 1998, 93). Again, there is a strong internal coherence to his position, but no immediately apparent reason as to why we should agree that realism adheres to medium as strongly as Bourdieu suggests here.

[14] Statistician David Freedman has described this move as exemplifying the "ecological fallacy," or unjustified movement between two distinct empirical levels (Freedman 1999).

Even the photographic process Bourdieu envisions departs radically from the world as we experience it. Take his contention that

> Although the field of the photographable may broaden, photographic practice does not become any more free, since one may only photograph what one must photograph, and since there are photographs which one must "take" just as there are sites and monuments which one must "do" (Bourdieu 1998, 37).

Here, the photographer does not even have agency over when to depress the shutter, but merely to respond to social expectation like a knee struck with a reflex hammer. This is especially difficult to square with the fact that Bourdieu describes his own photographic process as exceedingly deliberative and purposeful. In the final analysis, then, we are left with a hollowed our photography that bears little resemblance to how it is really practiced, a photography whose "values and rhythms, its reasons and its *raison d'être* are borrowed from elsewhere" (Bourdieu 1990, 71). At this point, it may be tempting to dismiss Bourdieu as media theorist *tout court*, and this might be warranted were it not for a series of lectures he gave on Édouard Manet at the Collège de France at the end of his life and which offer a much more compelling vision of the relationship between image and society.

IV. THE MYTHOLOGY OF MODERNITY

FIGURE 10: Édouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863)

SOURCE: Musée d'Orsay

In 1863, Édouard Manet sent a shockwave through Paris. The offending canvas, entitled *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* ("The Luncheon on the Grass") depicts a female nude and semi-nude female bather on a picnic with two fully dressed men in the countryside. Though the nude had long been commonplace in the tradition of Western painting, the specific combination of the figures in various stages of undress provoked controversy (Boime 1987). Summarily rejected by the Salon, Manet exhibited the piece in the now famous Salon de Refusés ("exhibition of rejects"). It is precisely these sorts of controversies that motivate

Bourdieu's course on Manet at the Collège de France between 1998 and 2000.[15] He explains, "an analysis of the reactions provoked by the effects of a work of art allows us to seize the implicit and unconscious assumptions that the artist, the critics and the public share to a certain extent, that is to say what we might call the 'common sense' of the period" (Bourdieu 2017, 53).[16] With such an orientation, it is easier to see the connection between these lectures and Bourdieu's earlier work on *habitus*, which has increasingly been understood in an intensely bodily way.[17]

Be that as it may, Bourdieu's own photographs are also being more and more interpreted as his attempt to document *habitus* as fundamentally a phenomenon of the body, which raises the question of what then analytically differentiates painting and photography for Bourdieu. Despite the years separating the Collège de France lectures and *Un art moyen*, Bourdieu sounds remarkably similar. He describes an experiment in which he "compiled a set of photographs among which there were two nudes… and photographs of unimportant objects like pebbles, etc., in order to test the differential reactions of viewers with different levels of education when faced with these objects," with the result that "In the least educated section of the public, paintings of nudes still provoked scandalized reactions of the type that

[15] And which have also only relatively recently been translated into English, which perhaps explains their comparatively minor impact of the state of Bourdieu studies in the Anglosphere.

[16] Cf. British art historian Michael Baxandall's "period eye," which holds that "some of the mental equipment a man [*sic*] orders his visual experience with is variable, and much of this variable equipment is culturally relative, in the sense of being determined by the society which has influenced his experience" (Baxandall 1988, 36).

[17] Elsewhere, Bourdieu specifies, "communication with the work of art happens for the most part on the level of the unconscious, the unconscious being understood both as everything that is implicit and incorporated into our habits and also what is repressed, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word" (Bourdieu 2017, 27).

Manet attracted. And a photograph of a heap of pebbles aroused the same indignation as the painting of meaningless objects" (Bourdieu 2017, 79). Of course, Bourdieu is not responsible for such responses, but his decision to use this example reinforces the idea of photography as a transparent medium powerless to transform its subject matter, in which—contra *Pepper No. 30*—ordinary objects remain ordinary objects and nothing more.[18]

It is this "transparency" that Bourdieu identifies as a principal reason photography has had difficulty attaining the status of fine art. Referencing French academism, he notes how "the academic tradition gave pride of place above all to paintings of grand historical, classical or biblical themes, the hierarchy of works reflecting the hierarchy of objects," with that consequence that photography has found it difficult "to construct an aesthetic where the value of a work is not proportional to the value of the objects represented" (Bourdieu 2017, 183). We are left, then, wondering how we judge Manet if he is self-consciously breaking with the system of valuation followed by mainstream institutions such as the Salon. To take the specific example of portraiture, Bourdieu suggests that "one of the criteria that we may adopt to evaluate [to what extent a portrait is truthful] is the capacity of a portrait to grasp not only the physical image of a person, but also what I call the physical *hexis* of that person," or "that particular way of being at one with one's body, that manner of bearing oneself" (Bourdieu

[18] Regarding a similar experiment, Bourdieu relates how he "had several batches of photographs: photographs by well-known photographers, which I had … and on the other hand, photos of fake families that I had composed myself, with a man, a woman and children in different situations" (Bourdieu 2017, 213–4). He found, however, that "they elicited very similar responses. People wondered about the social or psychological relationships etc., between the characters, and not at all about the structure of the image" (Bourdieu 2017, 214).

2017, 265).[19] But as a social scientist, Bourdieu is not content to stop here—it is always incumbent upon him to extrapolate to larger social forces.

Turning to *habitus* more directly, Bourdieu justifies his lingering "over this act of painting as a structured and structuring act, imbued with historical structures" because it seems "to be the only way of articulating the work with the historical context in a nonmechanistic fashion" (Bourdieu 2017, 144).[20] This strange adjective "nonmechanistic" is the crucial word of this passage. Within the disciplinary squabbles that characterize much academic debate, art historians are sometimes criticized as removing objects from their original context in a way that deemphasizes their social uses.[21] It is surprising, then, when Bourdieu critiques the work of scholars like T. J. Clark from the *opposite* direction: as being overly "social" in their readings of Manet. Bourdieu warns how "all too often, avoiding formalist, internal readings merely means falling into materialism," though he admits this materialism "is itself a significant and interesting paradigm because it breaks with the internalist cult of the work" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). For Bourdieu, "Clark… incarnates this materialistic approach, which establishes a fairly straightforward link between a work and its social context" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). To fully

[19] While *hexis* is intrinsically related to *habitus*, it refers more narrowly to the bodily component of *habitus*, which would also encompass the set of intellectual dispositions associated with this "being with one's body."

[20] Bourdieu offers a fuller gloss of how he imagines this analytically later in the lectures: "The two-fold practical relationship that I have just described becomes actualized through the painter's habitus, which is itself the site of a whole set of relationships, conditions, constraints, etc., and which is related to the position that the painter occupies in the artistic field into which he is entering. It is because… the painter enters this field with his habitus… that his works contain many more things than he could ever have wanted to put into them" (Bourdieu 2017, 500).

[21] I will expand upon this point in the next chapter through my discussion of Sally Price.

appreciate the gravity of this departure, however, some background information on Clark is necessary.

Timothy James Clark is a British art historian most closely associated with the University of California, Berkeley, where he taught from 1988 until his retirement in 2010. A founding member of the College Art Association's Caucus for Marxism and Art, class analysis has been central to Clark's work since his dissertation, which produced *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France* and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic* (Clark 1973a, 1973b). His reputation was such his joining of the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard led to a feud with fellow faculty member Sydney Freedberg, with some even suggesting the move prompted the latter's early retirement (Tassel 2002). An article on Clement Greenberg in *Critical Inquiry* led to a debate with modernist Michael Fried that pitted formalism against the social history of art (Clark 1982).

Given this pedigree, we can more fully appreciate the uniqueness of Bourdieu's critique. Rather than criticizing Clark for not venturing far enough in the social or "materialist" realm, Bourdieu sees him as having gone too far, needed to be reined in my someone more committed to Manet *qua* artist. Instead, Bourdieu aligns himself with Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), a French poet and critic usually associated with the Symbolist movement (Moréas 1886). Often understood as a reaction against Naturalism and Realism, the Symbolists sought to represent transhistorical truths though visual and linguistic metaphors. Or as Mallarmé himself wrote in a letter to fellow poet Henri Cazalis, "to depict not the thing but the effect it produces" (Mallarmé 1945, 365).

At odds with Clark's "materialist materialism," Bourdieu vaunts "the symbolic materialism that Mallarmé incarnated and defended very well" and singles him out as "one of the very few to do this" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). Admitting that the position of Mallarmé was essentially what he wished to advocate, Bourdieu describes using him as a "springboard" for his own argument (Bourdieu 2017, 291). The poet is useful to Bourdieu insofar as he "understood very clearly what was at stake: the creation of a new value, a 'fiduciary' value" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). This new value is "fiduciary" insofar as it is "based on belief" and necessitates the creation of a "new economy" (Bourdieu 2017, 291). Clark, by tying Manet so closely to this social context, is for Bourdieu unable to recognize how Manet was able to push the confines of the "what is" toward the "what might yet be."

We are left here with a Bourdieu who seems to remain a social scientist despite himself. Through his critique of Clark, we might expect Bourdieu as effectively wanting to join the ranks of the art historians, whose job he believes he can do better than they. And yet, Bourdieu remains committed to some version of social explanation, however idiosyncratic. If is indeed true that "the subject of a work is a complex relationship between a socially constructed habitus and a historically constructed field, and that it is in the relationship between this habitus and this field that a theorem, or a new manner of painting, is invented," then Bourdieu's critique might be more far-reaching than it appears at first glance (Bourdieu 2017, 110). For if we accept that neither an exclusive focus on "social constructed habitus" nor "a historically constructed field" is sufficient for the full understanding of intellectual and artistic innovation, then the tendency of academic disciplines to silo the study of these different analytic registers may themselves be part of the problem (Taylor 2009).

V. EUROPE AND ITS OTHERS

When Pygmalion saw the Propoetides selling themselves, he was disgusted. They had committed the sin of denying the divinity of Venus, the goddess of love. In her wrath, Venus made them "the first to prostitute their bodies and their reputations in public, and, losing all sense of shame, they lost the power to blush, as the blood hardened in their cheeks, and only a small change turned them into hard flints" (Ovid 2004, 174). Taking a vow of celibacy, Pygmalion devoted himself to sculpture, carving a woman out of ivory so beautiful he fell in love with it, even bringing it gifts and creating a bed for it. When Venus's festival day came, Pygmalion made offerings at the goddess's altar and wished for a bride as perfect as his creation. When he kissed the statue upon his return, he found its lips had become soft and warm—Venus had granted his wish.

FIGURE 11: Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion et Galatée* (1890)

SOURCE: Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Pygmalion myth has been a popular subject of artistic depiction, including works by Auguste Rodin, Francisco Goya, and Jean-Léon Gérôme, whose rendition *Pygmalion et*

Galatée is reproduced here.[22] The same year, Gérôme created *Tanagra*, a marble statue of the Tyche, or tutelary deity, of the ancient Boeotian city of the same name. In 1890, Gérôme also produced at least two self-portraits that show him at work on the sculpture: *The Artist and His Model* and *Working in Marble*. These canvases depict a real Gérôme making a sculpture with reference to a living woman, whereas *Pygmalion et Galatée* depicts a mythical Pygmalion making a sculpture of a woman coming to life. The paintings show many props such as "quiver, saddle, armor, drums, waterpipes, flag, textiles, [and] masks," which Gérôme used "to enhance the authenticity of his Orientalist and classical scenes" (Dahesh Museum of Art 1995). In another self-referential twist, both *The Artist and His Model* and *Working in Marble* show two treatments of *Pygmalion et Galatée*, including the one above. Through this "continuous interplay between painting and sculpture, reality and artifice," Gérôme highlights "the inherently theatrical nature of the artist's studio" (Dahesh Museum of Art 1995). In his self-awareness and academic training (he both studied and taught at the École des Beaux-Arts), Gérôme is very much the elite artist Bourdieu envisions.

[22] *Galatée* is the French equivalent of Galatea, itself from the Greek Γαλάτεια ("she who is milk-white"), referring to Pygmalion's statue.

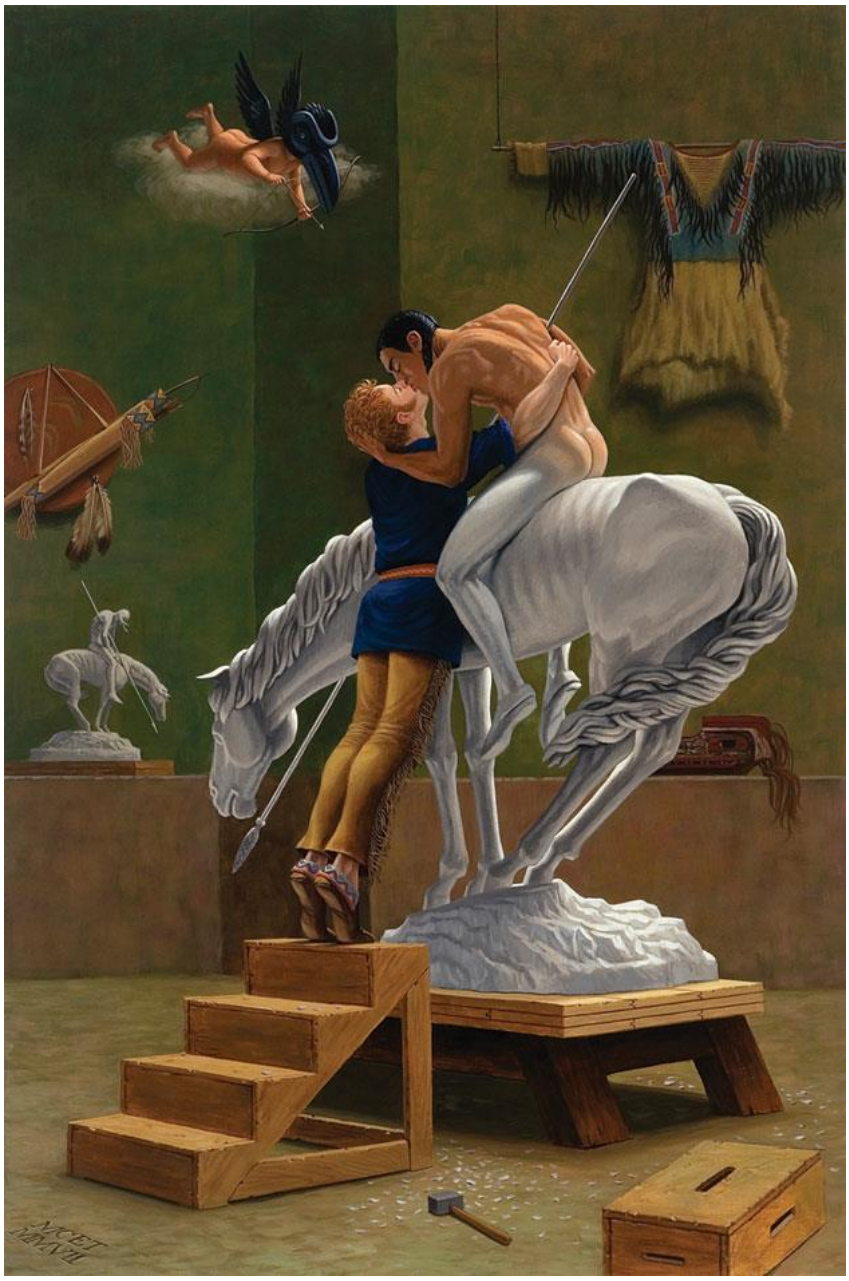

FIGURE 12: Kent Monkman, *Si je t'aime prends garde à toi* (2007)

SOURCE: Private collection

Like many artists who reach his stature, Gérôme had many students and imitators, and has entered the history books as one of the most important and consequential painters of his age. Recently, artist Kent Monkman has revisited Gérôme, and *Pygmalion et Galatée* more

specifically, with his *Si je t'aime prends garde à toi* ("If I love you, take care"), above. Monkman is a First Nations Canadian of Cree ancestry and member of the Fisher River band in Manitoba's Interlake Region who identifies as two-spirit. A pan-Indian umbrella neologism, "two spirit" encompasses a range of Native peoples who fulfill traditional third-gender or other gender-variant ceremonial and social roles in their cultures (Estrada 2011). Consider the Māhū, third-gender people in Native Hawaiian and Tahitian cultures who were historically "particularly respected as teachers, usually of hula dance and chant… and performed the roles of goddesses in hula dances that took place in temples which were off-limits to women" (Kaua'i Iki, quoted in Matzner 2001).

It is this intermediary quality that Monkman exploits to make visible the boundaries of classical European painting. By maintaining the *form* of Old Master painting but radically shifting its *content*, Monkman demonstrates its limits. Although also depicting a sculpture coming to life at the touch of its sculptor, the two are separated by race rather than gender; while Gérôme's Pygmalion falls in love with his ideal woman, Monkman's brings his sculpture of an Indigenous man to life with his kiss. This is not just any sculpture, however, but James Earle Fraser's *End of the Trail* (1928), which portrays a weary Native American man riding limp atop an equally weary horse. Scattered about the studio are various Indigenous artifacts and costumes, as well as a replica of the Fraser piece itself. Monkman's cupid bears a bow and arrow, but also wears a traditional mask. Far from being a mere backdrop, the Indigenous accoutrement of this scene are fully incorporated into Monkman's Pygmalion, who sports belted tunic, fringed pants, and beaded moccasins.

In this fashion, Monkman engages in what José Esteban Muñoz calls "disidentification," which he describes as a "third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it," but which "works on and against dominant ideology" (Muñoz 1999, 11). Monkman is certainly a critic of the tradition of European painting, but not from the outside—he embodies it masterfully, but as a method of making visible its pretentions and limitations. In contrast to heady self-referentiality of Gérôme, Monkman feels tongue-in-cheek, almost as if he's poking fun at Gérôme and the seriousness with which he takes himself.[23] Through his blending of high and low culture, Monkman pushes against the rigid aesthetic-socioeconomic hierarchies Bourdieu postulates. In Monkman's hands, the distinctions Bourdieu so carefully crafts cave into each other, demonstrating that medium is not necessarily destiny—that content and form are two sides of the same interpretive coin.

[23] Of course, one might accuse Monkman of succumbing to the same self-importance of Gérôme, though in reality this just serves to underscore the immanence of his critique.

CHAPTER THREE:

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS AND THE STRUCTURED IMAGE

I. WORLD AS TEXT

FIGURE 13: Claude Lévi-Strauss in Amazonia (ca. 1936)

SOURCE: Getty Images

You are perched at the bow of a shallow-bottomed canoe, cutting smoothly through the muddy water guided by the sure hands of a ferryman. Walls of dense vegetation lean in on either side, darkening the already dark waters with their shadows. All around is the gentle hum of insects, occasionally punctuated by the caw of a passing bird. Your body is littered with the bites of mosquitos that repellent seems powerless to keep away. You are exhausted and your body aches, accustomed as it is to the hushed comfort of European libraries. Your thick glasses keep fogging up in the dense humidity and sweat beads at your brow. Behind and before you other boats accompany you, laden with researchers and equipment. You have traveled for days by truck, mule, and foot, all in search of some of the most remote peoples on earth.

This is Claude Lévi-Strauss, *agrégé* in philosophy seeking to move up the French education system.[1] It is 1938, and he is a visiting professor of sociology, a discipline he has never studied, at the University of São Paulo, where his wife was teaching ethnology. Despite the fame he would later win as anthropologist, this was the only ethnographic fieldwork Lévi-Strauss undertook in his long life. Not fluent in Portuguese, let alone the languages of those he sought to study, Lévi-Strauss worked through often multiple interpreters (Indigenous languages to Portuguese to French). Extrapolating from what he reports of his own travels in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss never spent more than a few weeks in a single place, and sometimes stayed with a given tribe for only a couple days.

While he was teaching at a lycée, Lévi-Strauss searched for a way to bring together his "three intellectual mistresses": geology, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. And when he first read Robert Lowie's *Primitive Society* in 1933, he saw anthropology as a potential synthesis and quickly devoured its canon. Though Lévi-Strauss would later call his time in Brazil "the most important experience of his life" in an interview with *Le Monde*, his early impressions of the country are decidedly tepid (Mortaigne 2005). In a letter to the Brazilian writer and ethnomusicologist Mário de Andrade, who was then the founding director of the São Paulo Department of Culture, Lévi-Strauss relates his first day among the Nambikwara:

> Of the journey, I will say nothing. This region of Brazil is a god-forsaken, deserted bush land, through which we drove for 700 km. We were warmly welcomed by the telegraph team in Utiariti, who had prepared a beautiful hut on the banks of the river, situated, in a very thoughtful gesture, right next to the

[1] In France, the *agrégation* is a competitive examination that permits candidates (*agrégatifs*) to teach within the public education system as *professeurs agrégés*, normally at *lycées* (sixth-form colleges, age 15 to 18) and universities. This is distinct from recipients of the *Certificat d'aptitude au professorat de l'enseignement du second degré*, who usually teach at *collèges* (secondary schools, age 11 to 15).

> Nambikwara encampment. I am writing to you in the midst of fifteen men, women and children who are stark naked (but that's a shame since their bodies are not beautiful), with an extremely welcoming nature given that they are the same group (and probably the same individuals) who had slaughtered a Protestant mission in Juruena five years ago. Unfortunately, work promises to be extremely difficult: there is no interpreter at hand, a total ignorance of Portuguese and a phonetic language that seems impossible to understand. But we have only been here for 24 hours (quoted in Wilcken 2010, 91).

It should be immediately clear, then, why Lévi-Strauss skips over his first impressions of the Nambikwara in *Tristes Tropiques*, in contrast to his detailed account of first entering the Bororo village. In a scathing but fair appraisal of in the form of a review of a Lévi-Strauss biography and a "critical study of his thought," philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah distinguishes this approach from disciplinary forefathers like Bronisław Malinowski, who settled "by himself for several years among the Trobriand Islanders during World War I" or Edward Evans-Pritchard, who "spent nearly two years on his own among the Azande of the upper Nile" (Appiah 2020).

It is difficult to determine where to start with the above quote, which diverges sharply from both Lévi-Strauss's self-presentation and how he has come to be understood more generally. Rather than situating Lévi-Strauss within the tradition of scholars like James Frazer and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, Appiah sees him more akin to nineteenth-century explorers like Richard Francis Burton and John Hanning Speke. As someone who had spent his entire life on the European continent, Lévi-Strauss was chomping at bit to see the rest of the world (despite the famous first sentence of *Tristes Tropiques*) and readily admitted the arbitrariness of Brazil as a destination; "if the offer had been the South Pacific or Africa, he would have taken the post without a second thought" (Wilcken 2010, 41). We come away with an image of Lévi-Strauss as more interested in the idea of fieldwork than its practice, producing scholarship in

the vein of the Émile Durkheim who wrote a book about Aboriginal religion without having ever been to Australia.[2] One is tempted to agree with Appiah's assessment that "this ferocious autodidact… would slot his schemes wherever they would stick" (Appiah 2020). Is there, then, anything of value in Lévi-Strauss, or must he be thrown out like so much bathwater? In the end, Appiah does concede that however adverse Lévi-Strauss "was to Evans-Pritchard's notion that anthropology was finally humanistic and interpretative, was, precisely, an inspired interpreter, a brilliant *reader*" (Appiah 2020 original emphasis). On that account, let us now read Lévi-Strauss himself.

II. INTO THE JUNGLE

In 1935, Lévi-Strauss accepted a last-minute visiting professorship in sociology at the University of São Paulo while his wife Dina would serve as visiting professor of ethnology. For the next four years, the couple lived and conducted fieldwork in Mato Grosso and Southern Amazonia. They first studied the Bororo and Guaycuru peoples, with whom they only stayed a few days. Their second trip in 1938, however, lasted over six months and focused on the Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib peoples. Due to an eye infection that forced his wife to return to São Paulo prematurely, Lévi-Strauss completed the study himself and thus cemented his anthropological identity.[3]

Despite their brevity, these expeditions would form the basis of Lévi-Strauss's scholarly and public personae. The minor theses he submitted to the Sorbonne for his *doctorat d'État*

[2] Bear in mind Lévi-Strauss's borrowing of the title structure of *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* for his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

[3] The result of this is that Lévi-Strauss "never have stayed in one place for more than a few weeks at a time and… was never able to converse easily with any of his native informants in their native language" (Leach 1989, 12).

was *La vie familiale et sociale des indiens Nambikwara* (*The Family and Social Life of the Nambikwara Indians*).[4] Though it only discussed his time in Brazil in passing, the publication of Lévi-Strauss's major thesis, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (*The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) in 1949 was largely responsible for bringing him to academic fame. Lévi-Strauss was quick to return to Brazil in his 1955 memoir *Tristes Tropiques*.[5] Ostensibly a travelogue, *Tristes Tropiques* blended ethnography and philosophy into a genre-bending offering eagerly devoured by a Parisian public searching a new intellectual on which to latch on due to the declining popularity of Jean-Paul Sartre.[6]

Some early editions of *Tristes Tropiques* used some of the over 3,000 photographs Lévi-Strauss himself made between 1935 and 1939.[7] One of his last publications before his death in 2009 was his "photographic memoir" *Saudades Do Brasil* (1994), which compiled 180 of these images. Through captions and an introductory essay, Lévi-Strauss here reflects on this period of his life and the profound changes globalization has wrought upon the region since then. Though it may be tempting to disregard it as a "coffee table" book, *Saudades Do Brasil*

[4] The *doctorat d'État* no longer exists, having been largely supplanted by the *Habilitation à diriger les recherches*, which as its name suggests allows the holder to supervise PhD students.
[5] Literally "sad tropics," *Tristes Tropiques* was first translated by John and Doreen Weightman as *A World on the Wane*, but now usually appears in English under its French title.
[6] Indeed, British anthropologist Edmund Leach explains, "The great success of Tristes Tropiques in the France of 1955 was connected with the mood of Parisian intellectuals at that period and with the timely conjunction of a decline in the fashionable popularity of Sartre, a close contemporary of Lévi-Strauss, who like wise (in 18th century fashion) combines literature with philosophy" (Leach 1974, 86).
[7] Yet, Lévi-Strauss is simultaneously intent on downplaying himself as a photographer: "On my first expedition I had, in addition to the Leica, an oval-shaped miniature 8 mm camera whose name I have forgotten. I hardly ever used it, feeling guilty if I kept my eye glued to the viewfinder instead of observing and trying to understand what was going on around me" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 22).

contains some of Lévi-Strauss's most direct and sustained thoughts on the affordances of photography as a visual medium.

For a thinker famously concerned with the structures that undergird how humans think, perceive, and feel in contradistinction to those thoughts, perceptions, and feelings themselves, Lévi-Strauss's reflections upon the photographs he made among the Caduveo, Bororo, and Nambikwarain peoples are surprisingly emotional. In the prologue, he laments how "my old photographs… create in me a feeling of emptiness and sorrow" and highlight "the contrast between a past I still had the joy of knowing and a present of which I receive heartbreaking accounts from sometimes unknown correspondents" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 16). Needless to say, Lévi-Strauss has in mind here the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous groups within the South American interior, driven by deforestation, population growth, and many other forces.[8] While he admits "I would undoubtedly feel the same looking at photographs of Paris, New York, or Tokyo," to have seen São Paulo "on two occasions, with an interval of half a century in between, makes the shock infinitely more brutal" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 19).

Lévi-Strauss describes his feelings in many ways, but perhaps the most appropriate way to characterize them is as Lévi-Strauss himself does at the end of his prologue: "Let it then be taken for what it is: a testimonial, perhaps not devoid of interest for the historian, to Brazil and its people more than half a century ago, to whom—as well as to my distant youth—I

[8] During just the decade of the publication of *Saudades Do Brasil*, the total area of forest lost in the Amazon increased from 160,000 to 227,000 mi.[2] (Centre for International Forestry Research 2004).

address a friendly and nostalgic salute" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 23).[9] Indeed, the book borrows its name from the eponymous 1920 suite of twelve dances for piano by 20th-century French composer Darius Milhaud, who was similarly inspired by a stint in Rio de Janeiro from 1917 to 1919 while serving as a secretary to the poet and dramatist Paul Claudel, who was then the French ambassador to Brazil.

Despite their personal charge for him, Lévi-Strauss also refers to his photographs impersonally as "indices of people, of landscapes, and of events that I am still aware of having seen and known, but after such a long time I no longer always remember where or when" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 9). In elaborating this idea of the photograph as an aide-mémoire, Lévi-Strauss is careful to specify that "these photographic documents prove to me that they did exist, but they do not evoke them for me or bring them materially back to life" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 9). This understanding of the photograph as a kind of "proof" also pulls against the conception of it as an affective engine; the realm of legal dispute and Euclidean geometry rather than that of wishes, hopes, memories, and dreams. Admittedly, photography's presumed ability to accurately and dispassionately document reality isn't at all unique to Lévi-Strauss, but rather a widespread belief. All the same, uncritical acceptance from a scholar as careful as Lévi-Strauss ought to give us pause, especially when combined with the tensions in his own writing.

To be fair, Lévi-Strauss is aware of the limitations of photography. He specifies, "upon re-examination, the photographs leave me with the impression of a void, a lack of something

[9] Recent scholarship on the concept of nostalgia alerts us of its shift from medical diagnosis to expansive cultural category (Dodman 2018).

the lens is inherently unable to capture" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 9). Of course, a photograph is a poor substitute for direct physical experience; to say nothing of the fact that the worlds that these photographs depict no longer exist, at least not as they did when Lévi-Strauss documented them. But as attentive as Lévi-Strauss is to these shortcomings, he largely overlooks what photographs makes possible, some of which is suggested by his consideration of their ability to elicit emotional responses.

Since at least Kant, the West has struggled to understand the relationship between art and feeling. And while Lévi-Strauss doesn't apply value judgments to his own photographs, this isn't to say he shuns aesthetics tout court. On the contrary, he's quite comfortable sharing his assessment of others' beauty, particularly of women.[10] Consider the following: "The attractiveness of the Nambikwara… is largely explained by the presence in their midst of very young women who were graceful despite their sometimes rather thick waists" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 142). The preference Lévi-Strauss demonstrates here for "grace" and (implicitly) slenderness obviously reinforces Eurocentric beauty standards (Bhopal 2007). As an isolated incident, this isn't terribly interesting, though turning to similar remarks made of other tribes, we can begin to appreciate the reflexivity of this opinion and how it intersects with other biases: "One had the impression that this small [Mundé] community, well supplied with animal and vegetable food, lived a life of leisure, principally preoccupied with bodily beauty" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 180). As such, we can begin to sketch the associations linking Indigeneity, leisure, and the body.

[10] I thank Ann Morning for calling my attention to physical beauty.

Against the corporeal preoccupations of the Mundé, though, Lévi-Strauss contrasts the intellect of Europe.[11] Upon hearing an impromptu lecture from French geographer Emmanuel de Martonne (1873 –1955), Lévi-Strauss reminisces how he "realized that a landscape, when looked at and analyzed by a master, can become an exciting reading experience, as capable of training the mind as a commentary on a play by Racine" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 46). The Mundé could surely have helped to Lévi-Strauss to "read" the landscape as one might read literary criticism, but this occurs instead through the figure of the European scientist, capable of talking to Lévi-Strauss in an abstract conceptual language he could understand and appreciate.[12] The model of the anthropologist who comes from outside a community to make sense of it is aptly illustrated in how Lévi-Strauss describes his process: "Perched on the roof of a cabin like the macaws the Indians bred for their plumage, I took a panoramic view of the unchanging structure of Bororo villages: the men's house in the center and family dwellings, owned by the women, in a circle around it" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 89).

[11] In this way, Lévi-Strauss slips into a widespread tendency stretching from Christoph Meiners to Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray that equates the white race with intelligence (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Meiners 1786).

[12] Like many of his contemporaries, Lévi-Strauss extensively studied philosophy and was eminently at home within it (Appiah 2020).

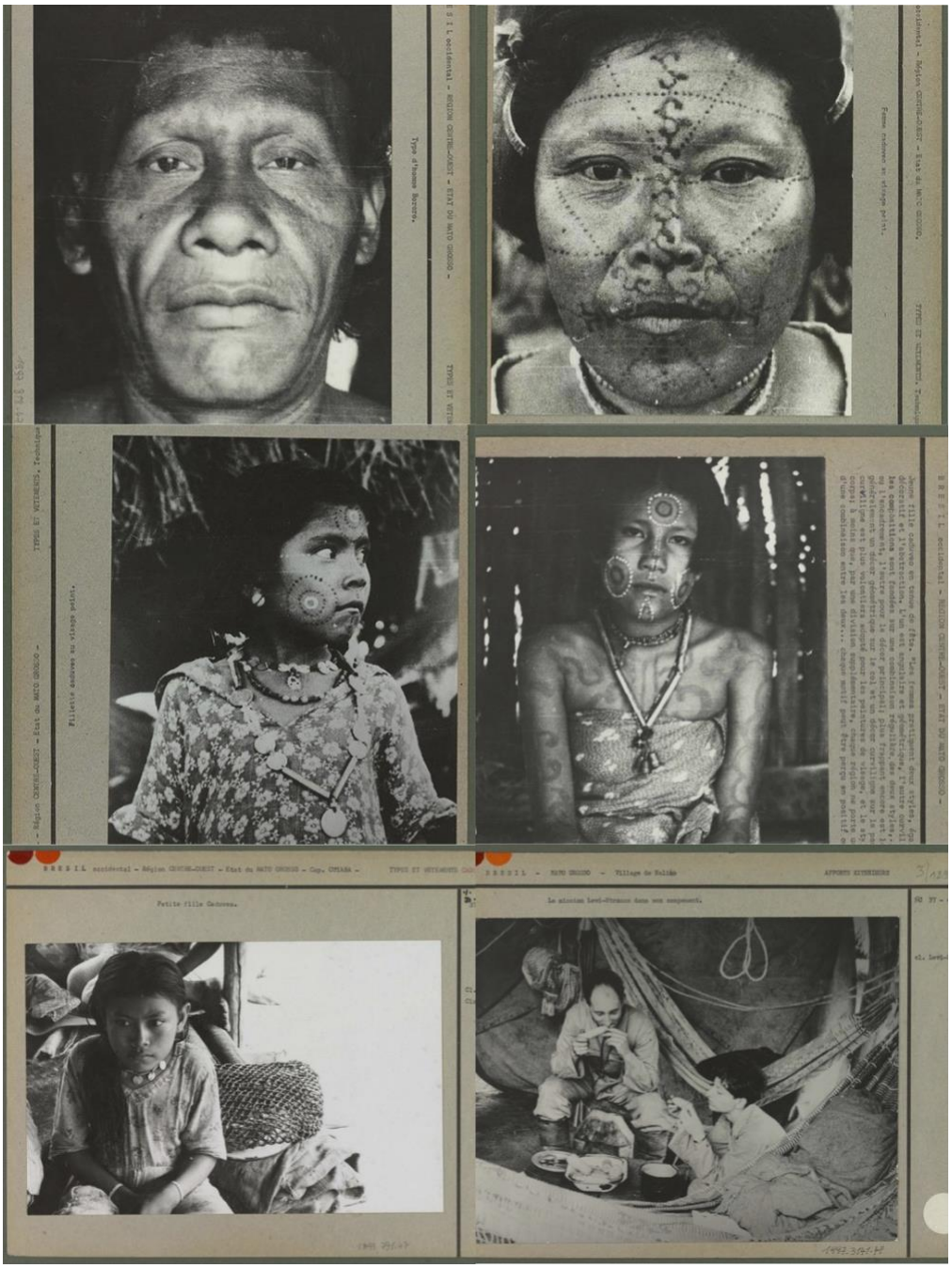

FIGURE 14: Photo array 3

SOURCE: Musée du quai Branly

This vision of researchers literally over and above their subjects recalls some of the compositional choices of Bourdieu; though when we turn to Lévi-Strauss's photographs, they

look quite different from those of Bourdieu. The opposite photo array reveals a marked predilection toward the face and conventions of traditional portraiture (e.g., well-lit, centered faces; reduction of background "noise"; etc.). In short, the disconnect between how Lévi-Strauss conceives of himself as a photographer and his actual photographs parallels the ambivalence previously identified between photography as a subjective medium of emotion and photography as an objective medium of proof.

Going back even further to the distinction he makes between the engineer and the bricoleur in *La Pensée sauvage*, we can find yet another incidence of Lévi-Strauss's disparate treatment of himself versus those he studies. An ostensibly minor comment, Lévi-Strauss relates how in Cuiabá, the capital of Mato Grosso, "I had commissioned a seamstress to make a mosquito net of my own design for the hammock [of our camp]" and how entering New York during the war "an American intelligence service… grilled me about my travels and had all my negatives printed. The mosquito net interested them very much, and I was asked for its pattern and dimensions" (Lévi-Strauss 1995, 170). Notwithstanding how he strangely seems to use the occasion to brag about his mosquito net construction skills, the method Lévi-Strauss lays out is that of the engineer, that modernist creature able to mentally erect solutions to problems and find materials to actualize this plan, as opposed to the premodern *bricoleur* who makes do with whatever is at hand, as he envisions tribes like the Caduveo, Bororo, and Nambikwara operating.

In toto, *Suadades do Brasil* leaves us with a rather discordant impression of Lévi-Strauss. Insisting on his low opinion of photography, Lévi-Strauss nevertheless decided to publish a book of photographs. Expressing grief over the accelerating marginalization of Indigenous

peoples, Lévi-Strauss simultaneously takes pains to distinguish himself from them. To get a handle on these contradictions, it is necessary to compare Lévi-Strauss's approach to photography with how he deals with other visual media across his oeuvre. Accordingly, we turn now to *La Voie des masques*, Lévi-Strauss's study of the Swaihwe mask.

III. BEHIND THE MASK

In 1940, Lévi-Strauss was denaturalized. He had returned to France the previous year to join the Resistance and to teach at a *lycée* in Montpellier, until he was dismissed under Vichy racial laws, which prohibited Jews from working in public services. Luckily, he was able to sail to the colony of Martinique in the Lesser Antilles, and from there moving on to New York City where, like many of his fellow expatriates, he was offered a position at the New School for Social Research, where he would remain for most of the war. Though the move was obviously fueled by political exigencies, his time in New York would prove formative, as it was here that co-founded the *École libre des hautes études* (1941–46), a "university-in-exile" charted by the French and Belgian governments-in-exile housed by the New School (Zolberg 1998). Mostly composed of French academics like Gustave Cohen, Henri Focillon, Jacques Maritain, and Jean Wahl, the École libre also provided a temporary home for those fleeing the Russian Civil War (1917–23) like Elias Bickerman and, most important for present purposes, Roman Jakobson.

Jakobson was a key figure in the elaboration of the structural approach to language pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), whose posthumous *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in General Linguistics) pioneered the idea that "Words are not mere vocal labels or communicational adjuncts superimposed upon an already given order of things," but

rather "collective products of social interaction, essential instruments through which human beings constitute and articulate their world," in the words of Saussure translator Roy Harris (Harris 1988, ix). Shortly after he returned to Paris in 1948, Lévi-Strauss published his aforementioned *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, on which the influence of Jakobson is readily apparent. A deeply comparative study, *Les structures élémentaires* examined the logical structures that underlay familial relationships rather than the content of these relationships and argued that ostensibly complex forms of social organization were just permutations of a few basic kinship structures. Lévi-Strauss's New York sojourn would also affect him in less direct ways, to one of which we now turn.

Lévi-Strauss begins *La Voie des masques* with his description of a visit to the American Museum of Natural History in 1943. He writes, "This place, on which outmoded but singularly effective museographic methods have conferred the additional allurements of the chiaroscuro of caves and the tottering heap of lost treasures, may be seen daily from ten to five o'clock" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 3). The room in question is devoted to the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Although Lévi-Strauss is obviously encountering these objects in the context of a natural history museum, he predicts "it will not be long before we see the collections from this part of the world moved from ethnographic to fine arts museums to take their just place amidst the antiquities of Egypt or Persia and the works of medieval Europe" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 3).[13]

When Lévi-Strauss published *La Voie des masques* (*The Way of the Masks*) in 1975, his anthropological reputation was already firmly established. With *Les structures élémentaires* (1949)

[13] See the discussion of Sally Price, below.

he had established himself academically and with *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) had introduced himself to the broader public. Setting his sights on the theorize of mythology in particular, Lévi-Strauss asserted in his agenda-setting *Structural Anthropology* (1958) that "Myth is language, functioning on an especially high level where meaning succeeds practically at 'taking off' from the linguistic ground on which it keeps rolling" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 210). This idiosyncratic brand of anthropology was articulated in *La Pensée sauvage* (1962) and demonstrated in his four-volume *Mythologiques* (1964–71), which traces the variations of a single myth across the Americas, analyzing in typical fashion the underlying structure of the relationships between its characters of a story rather than the content of these stories themselves.[14]

Fresh from his defense of the "structuralist theory of mythology," Lévi-Strauss takes a break from language to consider material culture, though not a very long one since he returns to myth almost immediately (Gabriel and Žižek 2009, 61). He claims, "As is the case with myths, the masks (with their origin myths and the rites in which they appear) become intelligible only through the relationships that unite them" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 93). Building upon this premise, however, Lévi-Strauss reasons, "a mask is not primarily what it represents but what it transforms… what it chooses not to represent. Like a myth, a mask denies as much as it affirms. It is not made solely of what it says or thinks it is saying, but of what it excludes" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 144). In other words, every choice of the mask-maker is also a decision against every other possibility (e.g., this feather and not that, this color and not that, etc.). To

[14] Lévi-Strauss is himself relatively explicit about his debt to Jakobson: "… if one wants to establish a parallel between structural linguistics and the structural analysis of myths, the correspondence is established not between mytheme and word but between mytheme and phoneme" (Lévi-Strauss 1988a, 148).

say nothing of the fact that the use or creation of one mask is always already a passing over of other options in that "a mask does not exist in isolation; it supposes other real or potential masks always by its side, masks that might have been chosen in its stead and substituted for it" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 144). It follows, then, that "as is the case with myths, masks, too, cannot be interpreted in and by themselves as separate objects" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 12).

And yet, this isolation of masks "in and by themselves as separate objects" is precisely the orientation implied if these masks were to fulfill Lévi-Strauss's wish of seeing them "moved from ethnographic to fine arts museums to take their just place amidst the antiquities of Egypt or Persia and the works of medieval Europe" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 3). In her *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, Sally Price summarizes the war between art history and anthropology over the display of Indigenous objects; the former advocating for their isolation as the products of creative genius, the latter preferring to situate them within dioramas or other formats designed to demonstrate their use (Price 2001). What is at stake in these disagreements rises far beyond the level of professional squabble as they reveal unspoken assumptions about the relative worth of cultural products and, by extension, their creators. Lévi-Strauss seems to be well situated on the anthropological side of this divide, as evidenced by statements like "My hypothesis… will be proven right if, in the last analysis, we can perceive, between the origin myths for each type of mask, transformational relations homologous to those that, from a purely plastic point of view, prevail among the masks themselves" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 14). Therefore, the mask is epiphenomenal, useful only insofar as they reflect or confirm the more fundamental social reality of myth and, ultimately, language.

Like Price, Lévi-Strauss acknowledges the divide between anthropology and art history; unlike Price, he sees this division as not one of perspective but of right and wrong. Unsurprisingly, Lévi-Strauss places himself on the "winning" side of this battle: "It would be misleading to imagine… as so many ethnologists and art historians still do today, that a mask and, more generally, a sculpture or a painting may be interpreted each for itself, according to what it represents or to the aesthetic or ritual use for which it is destined" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 144). For Lévi-Strauss, the cult value Walter Benjamin famously attributed to mechanical reproduction did not wither away—it never existed (Benjamin 1969). In the Lévi-Straussian framework, humanists are deluded by their belief in the autonomy of the work of art, blissfully unaware that it's "social all the way down."[15] Nothing if not consistent, Lévi-Strauss extends this point to the artist, who "thinks he is expressing himself spontaneously, creating an original work, he is answering other past or present, actual or potential, creators. Whether one knows it or not, one never walks alone along the path of creativity" (Lévi-Strauss 1988b, 148).[16]

In another moment of ambivalence, one of Lévi-Strauss's last publications focuses on the precisely the realm of art he disparages in *La Voie des masques*. First appearing in 1993, *Regarder, écouter, lire* is Lévi-Strauss's first attempt to address aesthetics head-on. Ranging across painting, music, literature, and other mediums to understand the nature of the beautiful. Tellingly, Lévi-Strauss only examines Indigenous peoples briefly at the end of the monograph. Instead, his primary references are figures like Eugène Delacroix, Nicolas Poussin, Marcel

[15] This sort of epistemological imperialism has quite deep roots within the social sciences, especially in France. Indeed, it was Durkheim himself who wrote in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that "[G]od and the society are one and the same" (Durkheim 1995, 208).
[16] I retain Lévi-Strauss's gendered language.

Proust, and Arthur Rimbaud. Through such a selection, Lévi-Strauss reinforces the idea of Europe—and particularly France—as the privileged purveyor of beauty.

IV. IN SEARCH OF BEAUTY

Gustave Claude Lévi-Strauss was born on November 28, 1908, in Brussels, where his father was completing a commissioned painting, though this was not the only work he produced during this trip (Loyer 2018). He also drew a sketch of the city viewed from the room of his son's birth, which Lévi-Strauss kept as a "memory-object" (Lévi-Strauss 1985, 18). Upon their return to Paris, the Lévi-Strausses took up residence at 26 rue Poussin, a street in the 16th arrondissement named after Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). Indeed, Poussin seems to bookend Lévi-Strauss's life, as he devotes first section of *Regarder, écouter, lire* is devoted to the Baroque painter.

FIGURE 15: Jean Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), *Trompe-l'œil de putti jouant avec un bouc*

SOURCE: Private collection

A key concept Lévi-Strauss relies upon in this section is *trompe-l'œil*, a French expression that literally means "deceive the eye" and designates the use of artistic strategies to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Although *trompe-l'œil*, stretches back to antiquity, the development of linear perspective in Renaissance opened new frontiers for it, including *quadratura*, a method of feigning architecture through techniques like foreshortening to "open up" walls and particularly ceilings. Consider the above piece by Jean Siméon Chardin, a French painter whom Lévi-Strauss singles out as a *trompe-l'œil* master. Entitled *Trompe-l'œil de putti jouant avec un bouc* (*Trompe-l'œil* of *putti* playing with a goat), this canvas relies upon multiple optical tactics.[17] Through shading, Chardin gives his figures a sense of heft, as though they were objects truly capable of casting shadows. This effect is heightened by those instances where bodies overlap, most notably the bottom right *putto*. Placing another *putto* against his groin forces the left leg toward the front while (presumably) obscuring the right altogether. As the eye seeks to make sense of this layering, the brain pushes and pulls the elements backwards and forwards to produce the sensation of depth.[18]

Regarding the phenomenon, Lévi-Strauss asserts, "artists have long been judged by their capacity to imitate reality to perfection—a criterion that still prevailed in our own culture until recently" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 26). Indeed, the value of works of art and hence the value

[17] *Putti* is the plural of the Italian *putto*, a painted or sculpted chubby male child, usually naked and occasionally winged, which originally signified the passions but which during the Baroque era came to represent cherubim and, by extension, the omnipresence of God.
[18] One of the major processes through which this occurs is called *stereopsis*, from the Greek στερεός ("solid") and ὄψις ("sight" or "appearance"), whereby the slightly different inputs fed into the cerebral cortex from the left and right eyes allow the viewer to perceive depth, essentially by triangulating between a point of focus and the two eyes (Howard and Rodgers 1995).

of artists has often been reflected in the level of craft that verisimilitude requires.[19] In seeking to explain what gives *trompe-l'œil* its "power of enchantment," Lévi-Strauss attributes it to "the seemingly miraculous coalescence of the indefinable and fleeting aspects of the sensible world, as obtained by technical procedures that, after considerable intellectual labor and a slowly acquired mastery, allow these aspects to be reconstituted and permanently fixed" (Lévi-Strauss, 28). Relying on rigorous training, the artist preserves moments of everyday life that would otherwise fade away.

Of course, the reign of *trompe-l'œil* is forever changed by the advent of photography. Yes, its methods may have been far from reproducible in its early days, but eventually the camera would advance to the point that it seemed more capable of more accurately representing reality.[20] However, Lévi-Strauss warns would be "erroneous to believe that photography killed the art of trompe l'oeil" because "photographic realism does not distinguish accidents from the nature of things, but places them both on the same level. There is certainly a process of reproduction, but the part played by the intellect is minimal" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 29). In this way, Lévi-Strauss echoes Bourdieu's low opinion of photography as an instantaneous and uncritical medium, capable only of serving the undigested world around us. But unlike Bourdieu, Lévi-Strauss allows photography *some* aesthetic value, even if only indirectly: "As the term *snapshot* suggests, photography seizes this moment [of beauty] and exhibits it. Trompe l'oeil grasps and displays what was not perceived… but that, thanks to its

[19] Consider *Pronkstilleven*, an ornate style of Dutch still lifes that emphasized abundance by depicting a large range of objects, fruits, flowers, and dead game.
[20] In his defense, not even Lévi-Strauss is naïve enough to accept this proposition: "we have surrendered the representation of recent history to photography and film, under the illusion that they reproduce the events in their reality" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 26).

art, can now be seen at one's leisure" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 30). Like a mirror, the camera can at best reflect a beauty found outside of itself, whereas a painter armed with the tools of *trompe-l'œil* can create beauty ex nihilo.

With this in mind, we can better understand passages of *Regarder, écouter, lire* that might puzzle at first reading, such the praise Lévi-Strauss heaps upon early photographs, "produced at a stage when the primitiveness of technical means required the artist to throw all his science, time, and will into the balance" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 29). If we associate the beauty of a work of art with the amount of effort put into it, then the "inefficiency" of early photography is a strength rather than a weakness, since it increases the energy imbued in them by their makers. One of the hallmarks of modernity for Lévi-Strauss is how this effort itself has eclipsed the ostensible goal of this effort. Or in Lévi-Strauss's words, how "we no longer pay equal attention to the form and the subject matter. We are less interested in what a painting represents than in the way the painter chose to represent it" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 65). But the corollary is also true: To focus on *what* is depicted rather than *how* it is depicted is a hallmark of premodernity. In what he presents as an amusing but telling anecdote, Lévi-Strauss relates the story of the portraitist George Catlin (1796–1872), who specialized in Native Americans during the Old West: "the Plains tribes made a mistake… when they first saw a white painter, Catlin, at work. He had drawn one of them in profile; another, no great friend of the first, cried out on seeing the picture that it proved the model was but half a man. A deadly fight ensued" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 27).

Once again, art violates the rules Lévi-Strauss so carefully lays out. On the one hand, Lévi-Strauss knows that elevating the work of art would come at the expense of lowering the

dense web of relations to which all is subservient, the all-powerful social structure silently determining all we see, feel, and think.[21] On the other, he concedes, "The beautiful object… weakens or breaks with the simple relations that connect the different objects of daily experience, and to which it is tied as one object among others. One takes note of this effect, or even assists it, by setting off the art object from its surroundings" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 80). In other words, the very existence of a distinction between art and non-art betrays the fact that we *do* distinguish between objects and that the fabric of society isn't as tightly stretched as Lévi-Strauss would sometimes have us believe.

Even further, Lévi-Strauss treats these two qualities as engaged in a zero-sum with one another, such that "an increase in the relations internal to the work of art at the expense of those it maintains with the world without serves to extend its power. That these relations are related to each other sets the work apart as an independent entity" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 80). Hence, Lévi-Strauss agrees that "Kant's definition of the work of art remains definitive: an (internal) finality devoid of any (external) end; in other words, an absolute object" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 80). As an attempt to square this circle between the work of art as an "an object among objects" and an object par excellence, Lévi-Strauss resorts to the metaphor of music: "How is an order established among a finite set of elements obtained at random, or among the disparate objects the *bricoleur* finds in his treasure trove? The idea of rhythm encompasses the series of permutations required to turn a collection into a system" (Lévi-Strauss 1997, 165).

[21] In this way, Lévi-Strauss follows in the footsteps of Durkheim, who argued that god and society "are one and the same" (Durkheim 1995, 208).

For Lévi-Strauss, rhythm offers a way of connecting individual notes into a melody composed of but greater than the sum of its parts.

With this move, Lévi-Strauss resolves the immediate problem but creates several more. Recall Lévi-Strauss's arguments from *La Pensée sauvage*, wherein the artist bridges the gulf between the *bricoleur* and engineer. Are the artist's products then able to be gathered through *bricolage*? If so, would they still be works of art? Is there a difference between stringing together notes to make a song and objects to make a society? At the risk of grandiloquence, are each of us effectively a note in a song called "Society"? And perhaps most importantly, where is the scientist in all of this? Perhaps perched on the roof of a cabin like the macaws, over and above the social while loudly proclaiming that the social is over and above us all.

V. ENTER THE CAGE

FIGURE 16: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Couple in The Cage* (1992–93)

SOURCE: Museum of Modern Art

In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the Taíno island of Guanahaní, which he renamed San Salvador. He returned to Spain with several kidnapped Arawaks, one of whom was left on display for two years.[22] Half a millennium later, artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña honored the occasion by collaborating on *Couple in The Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992–3). For this performance, Fusco and Gómez-Peña presented themselves as "undiscovered Amerindians from an island in the Gulf of Mexico that had somehow been overlooked by Europeans for five centuries" (Fusco 1994, 145).[23] Inspired by "the once popular practice of exhibition indigenous people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in zoos, parks, taverns, museums, freak shows, and circuses," the piece sought to inject a more critical component to the largely celebratory commemorations of the Columbus quincentenary. First conceptualized in response to an invitation from the Edge '92 Biennial in London and Madrid, *Couple in The Cage* would also travel to the Walker Art Center, the National Museum of Natural History, the Australian Museum of Natural History, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Intended as satire, many of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's choices were purposefully flamboyant and absurd. The couple performed "'traditional tasks,' which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer…. Two 'zoo guards' would be on hand to speak to visitors…, take us to the bathroom on leashes,

[22] Spaniards originally used the term "Arawak" to refer to Caribbean peoples they considered friendly, contrasted with the "Caribs," whom they considered hostile (Kim 2013).
[23] For more on Indigenous peoples in "voluntary isolation," see the white paper "Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation and Initial Contact in the Americas," produced under the auspices of the Organization of American States (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2013).

and feed us sandwiches and fruit" (Fusco 1994, 145). A *Washington Post* dance and theater critic described how Gómez-Peña "wore a feathered headdress and mask, sunglasses, patterned shorts, a chest plate hung with silver beads, and leather boots" and Fusco "was adorned with green and yellow face paint, a long black wig, sunglasses, a grass skirt, a leopard-print bikini top, assorted necklaces and headbands made of shells and teeth, and black sneakers" (Sommers 1992).

The result was shocking, though not in the way Fusco and Gómez-Peña anticipated. Despite their efforts, "substantial portion of the public believed that our fictional identities are real ones" and "a substantial number of intellectuals, artists, and cultural bureaucrats have sought to deflect attention from the substance of our experiment to the 'moral implications' of our dissimulation, or in their words, our 'misinforming the public' about who we are" (Fusco 1994, 143). Based on these assumptions, viewers felt entitled to react in certain ways they would have been unlikely to if they believed they weren't truly before "two undiscovered Amerindians." In an interview reflecting on their experiences, Gómez-Peña remembers how Spanish businessmen regressed "to their childhood, treating us as if we were monkeys—making gorilla sounds or racist 'Indian' hoots" (Johnson 1993). Fusco responds, "Men in Spain put coins in the donation box to get me to dance because, as they said, they wanted to see my tits. There was a woman in Irvine who asked for a rubber glove in order to touch Guillermo and started to fondle him in a sexual manner" (Johnson 1993).

What is most powerful about this intervention is how quickly and easily "we moderns" can revert to colonial scripts when given even the smallest opportunity (Latour 1993). As recently as the early 20th century, Indigenous individuals were used as zoo exhibits. One of the

examples Fusco explicitly mentions is a Mbuti man named Ota Benga, who was displayed "in a cage with an orangutan at the Bronx Zoo Monkey House" (Newkirk 2015, xiv).[24] The zoo's director, William Hornaday, explained in the face of criticism of the decision by African-American clergymen that "I am a believer in the Darwinian theory" and that he was "giving the exhibitions purely as an ethnological exhibit" (*New York Times* 1906a). The editorial board of *The New York Times* quickly leapt to Hornaday's defense, writing "The reverend colored brother should be told that evolution, in one form or other, is now taught in the text books of all the schools, and that it is no more debatable than the multiplication table" (*New York Times* 1906c).

The racism the Benga exhibition demonstrates operates at multiple levels. Another *New York Times* editorial suggests that Benga "is probably enjoying himself as well as he could anywhere in this country" and that the claim that he "should be in a school instead of a cage ignores the high probability that school would be a place of torture to him and one from which he could draw no advantage whatever" (*New York Times* 1906b). This is the type of racism to which we are most accustomed: the "Belief that humans are subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as superior or inferior" (Newman 2012, 405). But there are also other dynamics afoot, including one I shall call the "scientific gaze." The gaze as a concept has been incredibly successful (perhaps overly successful) across the humanities and social sciences, but I will use it in the

[24] In the popular press of time, Benga was often called a "Pygmy," or member of one of several short-statured peoples in equatorial Africa and Southeast Asia. While there is not currently consensus on whether this term is derogatory, I choose nevertheless choose to refer to Benga with his more specific tribal name.

sense implied by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, for whom "it indicates at its point of emanation the location of the subject, and at its point of contact the location of the object" (Beardsell 2000, 8). Though the concept can be applied in many ways, I will focus here on how certain individuals or groups become "material" or "data" for other individuals or groups.

But let us return to the aforequoted *NYT* editorial, which reasons that whether members of Benga's tribe "are held to be illustrations of arrested development, and really closer to the anthropoid apes than the other African savages" or "whether they are viewed as the degenerate descendants of ordinary negroes, they are of equal interest to the student of ethnology, and can be studied with profit" (*New York Times* 1906b). While such a view is certainly preferrable to one which does not see value in Indigenous peoples at all, it still establishes a dichotomy between the studiers and the studied, between those who analyze data and those who provide it.

It would be perverse to equate Lévi-Strauss with either of these strands of racism, but we can also hear their echoes throughout his work. While it is true that such critiques could be levied against all who "extract" knowledge from disadvantaged groups, the alternative (i.e., ignoring such groups altogether) is also undesirable; for how else would we obtain the knowledge necessary to improve life? Surely there are many potential difficulties that lie in wait for those who seek to research those unlike themselves, even more so when the researcher belongs to hegemonic social groups, as is all-too-often the case.[25] Surely too we frequently fall

[25] The attenuation of this divide is one of the impetuses behind what has come to be known as participatory action research, wherein "communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers" (Reason and Bradbury 2007, 1).

short; surely too we could also do better. Such is the frailty of being human, and those who like Lévi-Strauss seek to understand the vast complexity of social life deserve at least as much sympathy as we would grant anyone else.

If we are to mount a critique of Lévi-Strauss, then, it would not be along the lines of his audacity to learn from tribes like the Bororo, Guaycuru, Nambikwara and Tupi-Kawahib. Or even the fact that at the end of his long career he returned to the contemplation of the European experience. The problem arises in the disparate ways he approaches the colonizer and the colonized. Whereas the myths of the original peoples of the Americas provide the fodder for Lévi-Strauss's vision of a New Anthropology, the cultural products of Europe and especially France are allowed to be sufficient in and of themselves like the Kantian "absolute object." Perhaps Lévi-Strauss could have written a *Mythologiques* of the Continent, but he tellingly never tried. For all his efforts to demonstrate how *la pensée sauvage* was no different from its "civilized" cousin, it might have behooved him to turn his penetrating eyes inward more often.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FRANZ BOAS AND THE LIVING IMAGE

I. A SCIENCE OF SOCIETY

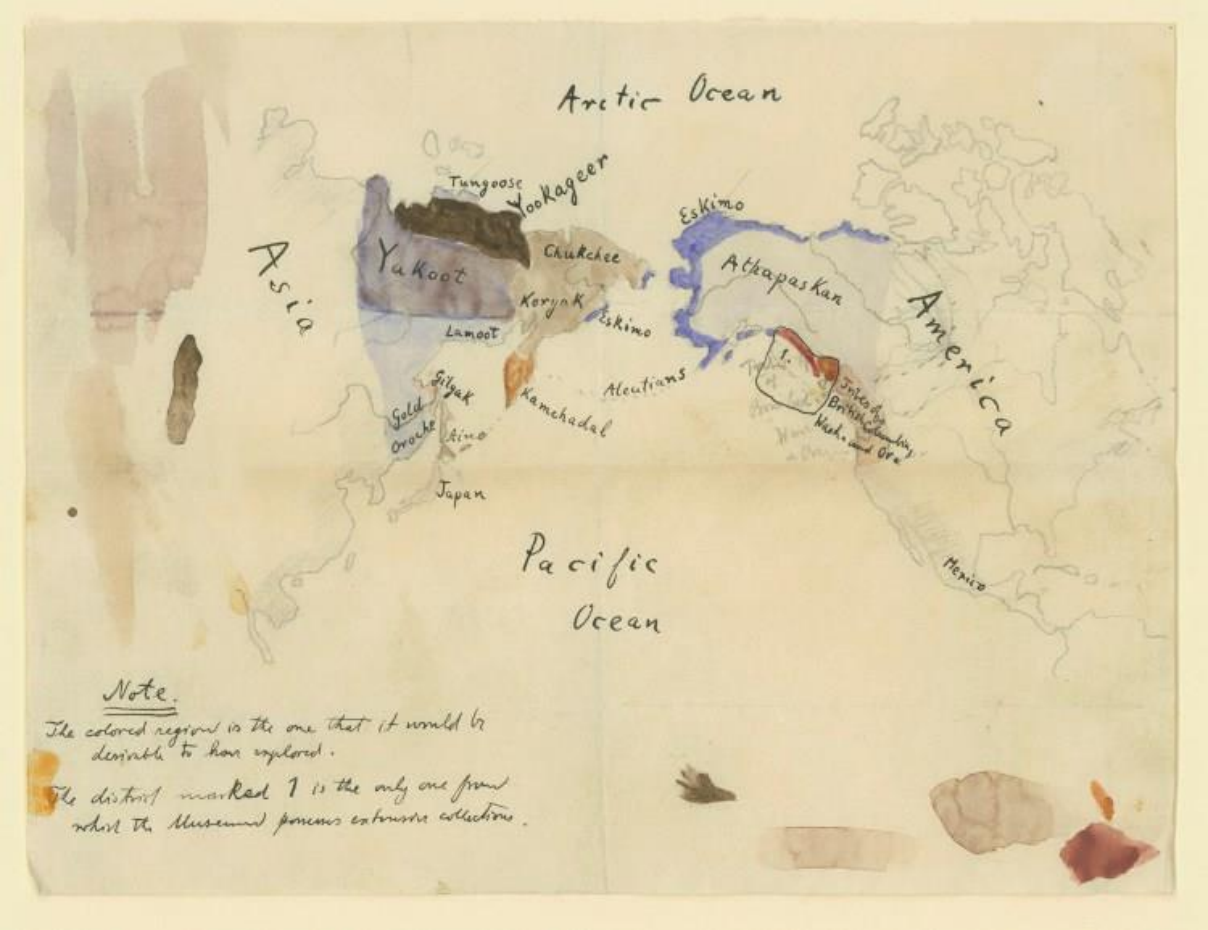

FIGURE 17: Franz Boas, Hand-colored culture distribution map (1896?)

SOURCE: American Museum of Natural History

You are cold. Bitterly cold. Tendrils of snow whip across the ground as if writhing in pain. Your lips are numb. Your breath immediately crystalizes in your beard, which will glitter brightly once you're beside a fire. At the same, you sweat beneath your clothes, your body straining beneath the weight of a heavy knapsack loaded with all manner of objects: maps and compasses, rations and notes. Flanking you are the other members of your team, rendered

silent by the length of the day. The still is punctured at turns by the whistle of wind or rustling of trees, any animal having the good sense to stay put until the storm passes. You are on the northwestern Canadian coast, or perhaps Alaska if you've already crossed the border—it's all but impossible to tell.

For Franz Boas, a moment such as this would not have been some strange torture, but the fruit of many years of work and planning. The Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897–1902), as it came to be known, was bankrolled by the industrialist-philanthropist Morris Jesup, who was president of the American Museum of Natural History, which Boas joined as Assistant Curator in 1896. Boas had been in the US since 1887, to which he originally came to serve as Assistant Editor of *Science*, partially to escape the rising tide of antisemitism in his native Germany. The following year he secured a job as a docent in anthropology at Clark University, whose newly created department of anthropology he went on to head the year thereafter, only to resign in 1892 in protest of university president G. Stanley Hall's alleged infringement of academic freedom.

After his departure from Clark, a series of stints with the World's Columbian Exposition and the Field Museum led Boas to his position with the American Museum of Natural History, where he organized the Jesup Expedition. Boas's interest in the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, however, stretches much further back. Following the completion of his compulsory military service in 1883, Boas first traveled to Baffin Island to study the relationship between the Inuit and their physical environment, which culminated in his first

monograph, *The Central Eskimo* (Boas 1888).[1] Upon his return to Europe, Boas joined the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin, where he first met members of the Nuxalk people of British Columbia.

Though his résumé demonstrates a deep and abiding connection to the discipline of anthropology, Boas's doctoral dissertation was in physics, entitled *Contributions to the Perception of the Color of Water*. Yet even then, Boas was drifting away. While studying at Bonn University, Boas attended the classes of geographer Theobald Fischer, a relationship which was rekindled when both moved to the University of Kiel and who would go on to become one of Boas's examiners (Koelsch, 2004, 5).[2] Despite his turn to their social cousins, Boas's experience with the natural sciences left a deep impression on him. During his doctoral research, Boas encountered great difficulty while attempting to objectively ascertain how varying the intensity of light shone upon different types of water affected the colors this interaction produced (Williams 1998, 57). This experience prompted Boas's interest in perception and its influence on quantitative measurement, a relationship he consider exploring through the field of psychophysics, which investigates the relationship between physical stimuli and the sensation they produce, a plan he ultimately abandoned due to his lack of psychological training (Liss 1995, 1996).

I engage in this digression not to offer a "complete portrait" of Boas (as if such an endeavor were possible), but rather to highlight an important idiosyncrasy of Boas's approach.

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[1] Though its etymology is debated, *Eskimo* has been largely abandoned as a potentially pejorative exonym in favor of *Inuit*, the plural form of the Inuktitut word for "the people" (see Dorais 2010, 297; Patrick 2013, 2).

[2] The status of Fischer as an examiner had led some to conclude that Boas likely completed one of his required "minor theses" in geography (Adams 2016, 39; Williams 1998, 57).

Since at least Auguste Comte, the dream of a social science as "objective" as the natural sciences has enticed its practitioners; a social physics of atomistic humans obeying universal laws.[3] And yet, many of these proponents did not receive substantial training in the natural sciences themselves, more frequently hailing from humanistic backgrounds. Lacking these experiences, their idea of natural science is much cleaner than it was in practice. For even in the literal physics that foundational figures like Comte looked at longingly, there were problems—chief among them the inability to see with anything other than human eyes.

With this in mind, we can better appreciate Boas's idiosyncrasies, especially regarding his use of media. Through his work in physics, Boas came to be suspicious of the ability of vision to accurately report the world. But rather than this causing him to eschew the visual, he ironically doubles down on his engagement with it. If every representation, he reasons, is successful in some respects but not others, then the solution is not to throw it out like so much bathwater, but to commit fully in the other direction. As an analyst, Boas is distinguished by what we might describe as his "data promiscuity," or willingness to avail himself of any available medium—all in the hope that through their triangulation we can get at some sense of the whole.

II. MUSEUM WITHOUT WALLS

During our most recent Ice Age (ca. 26,000 to 19,000 years ago), enough of the earth's water was locked up in glaciers that brought sea levels low enough to expose the Beringia land bridge, which connected northeastern Asia and western Alaska and allowed a small human

[3] This simplistic understanding of scientific progress has rightly been attacked from a wide range of angles, perhaps most effectively by Bruno Latour and his co-authors (Latour 1987, 1993; Latour and Woolgar 1986).

population to cross and thus settle North, and eventually South, America (ca. 13,000 years ago). Like much before the advent of writing, the specificities of this journey are shrouded in conjecture and speculation, though both genetic and linguistic similarities suggest a shared ancestry between Siberian populations and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Ash and Robinson 2011, 289; Roberts 2010, 101–3).

It was in an early investigation of this theory that Franz Boas planned, organized, and directed a five-year expedition to Siberia, Alaska, and northwestern Canada. Named for its sponsoring financier Morris Jesup, the Jesup North Pacific Expedition gathered several luminaries of 19th-century US and Russian anthropology including Livingston Farrand, John Swanton, Vladimir Bogoraz, and Vladimir Jochelson. An incredibly productive venture, the expedition resulted in an eponymous 12-volume series of monographs spanning art, mythology, archeology, basketry, craniology, and many other fields. Like many forms of social scientific inquiry, Boas and his collaborators gathered data at a specific moment in time, but which they hoped could nevertheless "find the *processes* by which certain stages of culture have developed" (Boas 1896, 905).

Uncovering such processes, however, requires multiple points of comparison, insofar as no society develops in isolation, contra the fiction of the isolated village whose passing Lévi-Strauss laments in *Tristes Tropiques* (Lévi-Strauss 2012). Indeed, no other than disciplinary forefather Émile Durkheim proclaimed that "by the methodical comparison of… historical data, and by this alone, [the sociologist] will evolve the notions appropriate to them" (Durkheim 1982, 246). Boas understood this perhaps better than most, and thus "shifted the goal of ethnography from the study of discrete objects, in a universal perspective, to a focus

on their cultural context, in a local setting" (Jacknis 1996, 185).[4] While singling out any given object simplifies interpretation, this comes at the cost of potential distortion or misrecognition. As historian of anthropology Ira Jacknis explains, Boas saw that "appearances were often misleading" and insisted therefore that "one must first place the artifact in the setting of its generating culture, and, by extension, those of its neighbors, before its true 'meaning' could be understood" (Jacknis 1996, 185).

But this contextualization also served a more mundane purpose. Regarding the collection of oral materials, Boas reports, "we now desire that each tale be obtained from several informants and from several places, in order to enable us to gain an impression of its importance in the tribal lore, and to insure the full record of its contents and of its relations to other tales" (Boas 1914, 375). Methodologically, this allows the researcher to distinguish "what is characteristic of a tribe" and "what is merely incidental" (Boas 1887, 489). True to form, Boas would amass a bewildering range of data during his first Arctic expeditions, collecting "maps (his own and those created by the Inuit at his request), meteorological observations, tidal measurements, and a collection of natural history and geological specimens," as well as "drawings and photographs" and "physical measurements and musical transcriptions" (Jacknis 1996, 188–9). While the sheer breadth of mediums here is unparalleled, "a similar multi-media approach would characterize the rest of [Boas's] fieldwork methodology" (Jacknis 1996, 189).

[4] Again, my reading of Boas is heavily informed by and indebted to Ira Jacknis, whose work on Boas and visual culture is unparalleled in scope.

The other upside of this comprehensiveness is how it also allows for the situation of objects within their broader cultural contexts. For example, "a pipe of the North American Indians is not only a curious implement out of which the Indian smokes, but it has a great number of uses and meanings, which can be understood only when viewed from the standpoint of the social and religious life of the people" (Boas 1907, 928). Yet whatever their importance, such objects are "only an exceedingly fragmentary presentation of the life of a people," with the result that the "psychological as well as the historical relations of cultures, which are the only objects of anthropological inquiry, cannot be expressed by any arrangement based on so small a portion of the manifestations of ethnic life as is presented by specimens" (Boas 1907, 928).[5] In *Forked Tongues*, his study of Native American literary texts, Americanist David Murray notes how Boas's "urge to include and collect" is "characteristic of a certain set of anthropological assumptions," whereby "the fragmentary and provisional nature of the actual materials, and of the relation to a changing culture is played down, is seen as a temporary transition between the cultural whole which preceded the work… and the scientific whole which will be reformed at some point in the future" (Murray 1991, 109). There is, in other words, a sort of ontological tradeoff whereby the preservation of a culture through academic research and the disappearance of the actual lived reality of that same culture are at work

[5] In his reconstruction of Boas's thought process, Jacknis imagines "an ethnic situation in which racial, linguistic, and cultural groupings did not neatly correlate, and in which cultural relationships reflected complex patterns of cultural diffusion; elaborate family privileges and iconography, which associated extended verbal accounts with artifacts; rank and private ownership, which restricted access to these stories; and severe depopulation and acculturative pressures… which pressured Boas to create documents of native cultures before they were irrevocably transformed" (Jacknis 1996, 193).

simultaneously.[6] The production of social scientific knowledge, then, provides a sort of testament, however poor, of a people who once were but are no longer.[7]

Though his views were quite radical for the time, it is all too easy to critique Boas and his contemporaries with the benefit of hindsight. For instance, Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor coins the term "survivance" to describe the shift from mere subsistence among the ruins of bygone cultures to the active refashioning of those cultures for the present day. In his *Manifest Manners*, he describes it as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name," and as thus renouncing "dominance, tragedy and victimry" (Vizenor 1999, vii). Extrapolating the meaning of this second neologism, Ojibwe/Dakota English professor Scott Lyons states that "To become Native by victimry is to develop a reactive self-perception" (Lyons 2010, 98). Of course, the unexamined assumption running beneath Boas's documentary urge is that there is some point at which a culture is *not* changing; some pure and unsullied point, in this case before the touch of European influence. Here we see an ambivalence at the heart of Boasian anthropology, which at once disavows and subscribes to the Lévi-Straussian myth of the hermetically sealed society.

But to return to Boas's use of recording media, Jacknis makes a simple but helpful distinction between "what might be called first-order tangible objects such as native-made

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[6] Consonant with the myth of the vanishing Indian, these objects "were conceived of as records for posterity, for science and all mankind, not the native peoples themselves, whom, Boas assumed, would be radically changed if they did not become extinct" (Jacknis 1996, 193).

[7] These and similar processes might be understood to characterize many societies to some extent: "Like the records of early European civilizations, ethnographic texts might survive the passing of the peoples who produced them, constituting, for the vanishing primitive, a permanent archive which could serve as 'the foundation of all future researches'" (Jacknis 1996, 198).

artifacts, which might be directly collected" and "second-order ethnographic objects constituted by the ethnographer as part of the process of ethnographic interpretation and representation," such as "maps, drawings, photographs, and films," as well as "sound recordings and musical transcriptions" and "various kinds of native texts, informal prose and ethnographic notes" (Jacknis 1996, 186). And while Boas readily and eagerly adopted the new recording devices of his day, he did not do so entirely uncritically. While Boas "never explicitly commented on photography as an ethnographic medium," we know he "was uncomfortable with its privileging of a *particular moment* of inscription" (Jacknis 1996, 204 emphasis added). In this way, Boas shares the opinion of those coming far after him like John Berger, who specified that "photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record," insofar as "every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights" (Berger 1990, 10).

Methodologically, Boas preferred to compare multiple sources to ensure reliability. Whereas "many texts and songs could be checked in this way," "photographs could not" (Jacknis 1996, 204). Revisiting the tension between the desire to document a vanishing culture and the knowledge that cultures are always in flux, Boas and his collaborators were faced with the task of "how to leave a permanent record of a culture that was simultaneously unwritten, changing, and disappearing" (Jacknis 1996, 193). In this case, the way to square this circle was either to collect the "tangible artifacts" of these cultures or to make "objects out of ephemeral sights, sounds, and words," as per Jacknis's above distinction between first- and second-order

media (Jacknis 1996, 193).[8] This use of media as preservative recalls what French film theorist André Bazin memorably described as a "mummy complex." Bazin imagines the plastic arts metaphorically "put under psychoanalysis," revealing that "the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation" (Bazin 2004, 9).[9] Mummification provided a symbolic "defense against the passage of time" and thus "satisfied a basic psychological need" by snatching the body "from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly… in the hold of life" (Bazin 2004, 9).

Joining Bazin and Boas, we might envision the recording media as object-making machines transforming the succession of moments into a stabler form that "could be collected, preserved, and studied" (Jacknis 1996, 200). This "thingification" recalls, if obliquely, the vision of sociology as a "science of social facts" (Durkheim 1982, 175). The phrasing belongs, of course, to Durkheim, who defines such a fact as "any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint" or "which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations" (Durkheim 1982, 59). But rather than being unitary and stubborn like the Durkheimian social fact, the Boasian version is ghostly and elusive, only ascertainable through comparison.[10]

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[8] Of course, this was Boas's own strategy: "Aside from collecting actual physical remains, Boas created a number of second-order objects to document the physical appearance of the region's natives. Such multiple encoding was a frequent aspect of Boas' methodologically self-conscious anthropological style; all were different ways of creating permanent records of transient bodies, records which could complement or be compared with one another" (Jacknis 1996, 195).

[9] The "mummy complex" is, then, clearly a play on Sigmund Freud's "Oedipal complex."

[10] Indeed, if we associate Durkheim with the comparative method, then Boas is even more Durkheimian than Durkheim himself, at least on this score.

FIGURE 18: Photo array 4

SOURCE: American Museum of Natural History

If turn to the second-order photographs Boas himself made during the Jesup Expedition with this in mind, their form becomes quite telling. Consider photo array 4, wherein Boas shoots the same subject from various angles against a plain background; as though the eye were roving around the figure in a circle, stopping at various opportune moments to note differences of perspective. In all, these shots recall practices of bureaucratic photography like the mugshot. Though one might raise a kneejerk reaction like the association

of Indigenous bodies with criminality, I argue instead that they result from Boas's commitment to scientific rigor. Indeed, the mugshot was invented—or more precisely standardized—by French police officer Alphonse Bertillon in 1888, who turned to anthropometry ("the scientific study of the measurements and proportions of the human body") to streamline his low-level clerical job at the Prefecture of Police in Paris (Rhodes 1956). Just as Bertillon sought to identify recidivists reliably and accurately through his "Bertillonage" system, so too did Boas hope to create reliable and accurate records of societies he feared were slipping through his fingers.

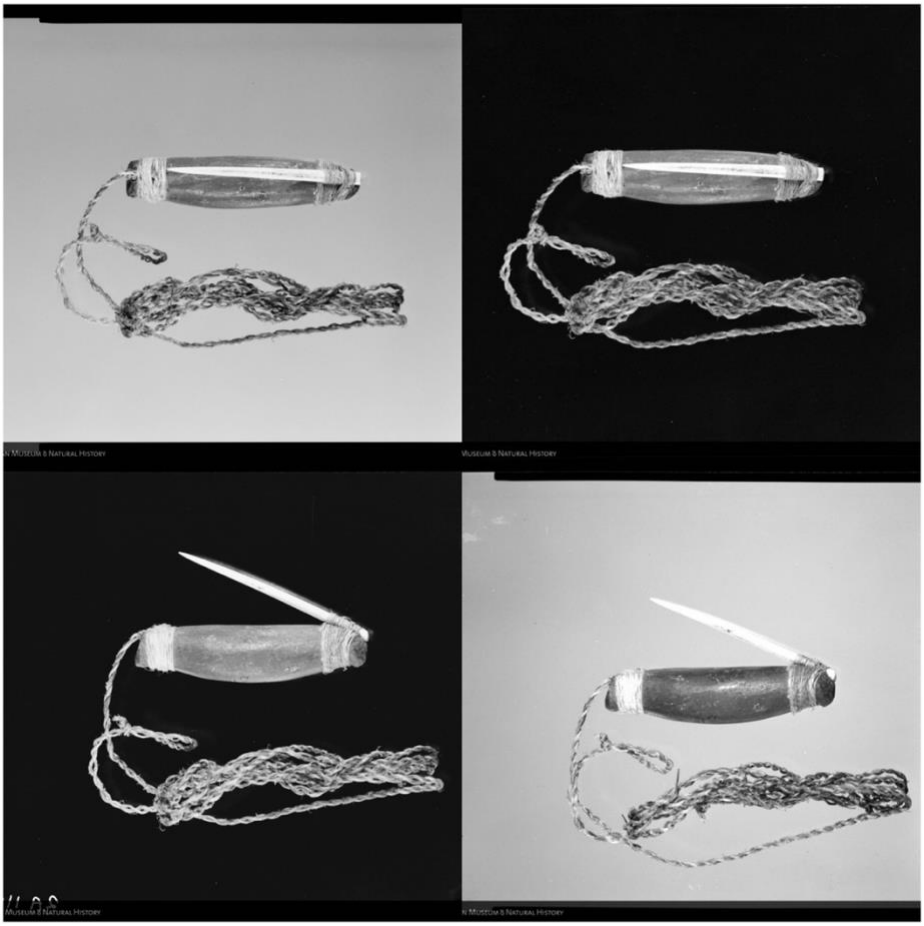

FIGURE 19: Photo array 5

SOURCE: American Museum of Natural History

Or consider photo array 5, for which a primitive switchblade is shot both retracted and closed against uniform white and black backgrounds. Rather than centering one image as the "correct" one, Boas prefers instead a proliferation of images, knowing that each has the potential to illuminate some form or function of the photographed object. There is admittedly a strange evenhandedness afoot here, with Boas extending as he does this same treatment to both animate and inanimate subjects. But like languages which maintain both formal and informal forms of address, perhaps the effect of this distance is not so much one of equation (e.g., humans are no different from objects) as it is one of respect; the temporary suspension of the belief that one knows at the outset what one is looking for or what might in the end prove to be most important.

III. THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

Boas is distinguished from many anthropologists by the unusual amount of attention he devotes to visual and cultural media, even by the standards of a discipline once described as "both the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences" (Wolf 1964, 88). In typically Germanic fashion, Boas often begins these sorts of analyses with general pronouncements about the field under investigation. Early on in his "The Decorative Art of the North Pacific Coast," for instance, Boas states, "in consequence of the adaptation of the form to the decorative field, the native artist cannot attempt a realistic representation of his subject, but is often compelled to indicate only its main characteristics" (Boas 1995b, 59).[11] The observation is at once commonsensical and profound. It is of course strictly speaking

[11] I call attention here to Boas's gendered language, which I reproduce throughout this section.

impossible to render three dimensions in two, as in the case of a flat surface to be decorated.[12] The obvious consequence of this limitation is that every choice of the artist is just that: a *choice* to be understood and interpreted as such.

In search of an answer to this question, Boas examines how the artist "tried to characterize the animals he intended to represent by emphasizing their most prominent characteristics," which "gradually became symbols… recognized even when not attached to the animal form, and which took the place of representation of the entire animal" (Boas 1995b, 74). Hence, "as long as the recognized symbols are present, the identity of the animal is established" (Boas 1995b, 71). This synecdochic strategy is quite unremarkable, ranging from such common locutions as "mouths to feed" or "boots on the ground." As any language learner knows, however, these idioms can be entirely opaque to outsiders. In this case of the objects he is studying, this difficulty is visually compounded by what Boas elsewhere describes as a "disregard of the relative position of the essential elements of the object of representation" (Boas 1995d, 291).[13]

A key decision Boas points out in his conclusion to *Primitive Art* is how "either a perspective representation of the object as it appears at a given moment may be attempted, or the artist may decide that the essential point is to show all its characteristic parts, no matter

[12] With his characteristically straightforward logic, Boas argues, "The complete presentation of the object in all its aspects cannot be given; and the question therefore arises of solving the problem how to represent in an adequate way a three-dimensional object in a two-dimensional space" (Boas 1995d, 291).

[13] In lieu of addressing Boas's many texts on "primitive art" one by one, I opt instead for a more thematic approach in this section that moves a bit more freely over various works and time periods. Of course, the reader can keep everything separate if preferred by attending to the various citations, though I will occasionally note the source directly if I feel it's particularly relevant.

whether they are visible in a single view or not" (Boas 1995a, 302). If, for example, one wanted to paint a tiger on a vase, one must decide how many legs to give it. Of course, we know tiger have four legs. But if seen from a certain angle, the tiger might appear to have only three, the fourth momentarily hidden from the viewer by the animal's own body situated between the viewer and the missing limb. The artist, then, is left with the simple but insurmountable question of whether to depict the tiger with three legs as it sometimes appears or with four as it "really" is.

With this move, Boas effectively brings "primitive" and "non-primitive" art under the same analytic frame, with the result that their admittedly extreme formal differences stem merely from different responses to the same core problem: the impossibility of representation. The answer to the question of stylistic divergence lies, then, in social history and "not a difference in mental make-up" (Boas 1995a, 305).[14] In another move that lowers the boundary between primitive and non-primitive art, Boas attends especially to the level of virtuosity Indigenous artifacts exemplify, thus countering the false elision of modernity and skill. "One of the most important sources in the development of primitive decorative art," Boas asserts, "is analogous to the pleasure that is given by the achievements of the virtuoso" (Boas 1995c, 277).

On the origin of design, Boas speculates how as soon as "the workman begins to play with his technique—an occupation that is enjoyed by every virtuoso—then the opportunity is given for the origin of design" (Boas 1995d, 290). Decoration, Boas concludes, "may be largely explained as results of the play of the imagination under the restricting influence of a fixed

[14] Boas was a committed anti-racist across his career (Beardsley 1973).

conventional style" (Boas 1995c, 275). Unable to be exhausted by the demands of technique, these artists develop design as an outlet for work that while demanding for the novice would eventually bore the virtuoso. Relating a story of North Pacific woodcarvers who created remarkably lifelike human heads for a particular winter ceremony, Boas argues how "in those rare cases in which it is the object of the artist to deceive by the truthfulness of his representation, we find that the narrow lines imposed by conventional style may be broken through" (Boas 1995d, 293). As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that Boas himself would be similarly willing to pass beyond the boundaries of conventional social science.

IV. BRIDGING THE GULF

FIGURE 20: Photo array 6

SOURCE: National Museum of Natural History

Every five years, the German city of Kassel hosts documenta, one of the world's largest and most important exhibitions of contemporary art. Its fourteenth iteration in 2017, however,

included a perhaps unlikely participant: Franz Boas. The works in question are a dozen inkjet prints originally taken in 1895 that depict the anthropologist posing for a diorama at the US National Museum (documenta). In these photographs (some of which are reproduced in photo array 6), Boas performs the Hamat'sa ceremony, part of the cultural heritage of the Kwakiutl, one of the Indigenous peoples of the northwestern Pacific coast. In this dance, the initiate acts out the capture, return, and calming of a human-eating supernatural being named Baxwbakwalanuksiwe' (U'mista Cultural Society 2023). As previously discussed, Boas did not engage in these sorts of reenactments often, only turning them to as a last resort when field photographs or—better yet Native peoples themselves—were unavailable (Jacknis 1984, 33).

Eight years after their creation, these images resurfaced, prompting the museum's curator of ethnology to write to Boas that he had found twelve photographs of "a distinguished ethnologist in New York, posing in various attitudes to represent a cannibal eating up an Indian child with the measles; a great effort is made to expel this creature or to destroy him, hence the marvelous gesticulations" (quoted in Hinsley and Holm 1976, 306). In an article discussing this early period of Boas's career in the US, historians Curtis Hinsley and Bill Holm admit that while "the pictures obviously do not show Boas actually performing as a cannibal…. he certainly did catch the spirit of the occasion in each pose" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 307).[15] At this point in his life, Boas "had seen a lot of Kwakiutl dancing… and had spent quite a few long evenings squatted on a house platform and wrapped in a blanket during his three-week stay at Fort Rupert in late 1894" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 307). This recent,

[15] In marked contrast to the relatively sizable literatures on Boas's (in addition to Bourdieu's and Lévi-Strauss's) field photography, this article is one of the only pieces of scholarship I've been able to locate on these photographs of Boas himself.

close, and sustained exposure gave Boas "a very good idea of what [Kwakiutl dancing] felt like," which "he clearly wanted to reproduce… as accurately as possible for the museum display" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 307).

In any case, "almost every figure in the diorama was based on Boas' poses" in these photographs, lending credence to the theory of them having been "made as guides for the sculptor in preparing the mannequins for the display" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 306). Like many of his readers, Hinsely and Holm connect Boas to the mission of salvage ethnography, insofar as this "emphasis on cooperative, focused effort resulted in part from Boas' sense of urgency shared by many of his contemporaries—in the face of North America's diverse, fast disappearing aboriginal population" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 308).[16] The other impetus behind Boas's "all hands on deck" approach is more intellectually motivated, "derived from his holistic concept of culture as a scientific subject requiring… simultaneous investigation of language, mythology, social and economic structures, and their interrelationships" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 308).

We arrive, then, at the fundamental nature of Boasian anthropology, which necessitates "various simultaneous approaches to a single, complex phenomenon" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 313). As has been discussed above, this unitary orientation stems from both the preservationist impulse that salvage ethnography encouraged and Boas's notion of cultural holism, which methodologically requires many distinct but complementary strands of data collection and analysis. Unfortunately for Boas, it is precisely this nebulous if ambitious

[16] Although the term "Aboriginal" is now usually used to refer to the Indigenous peoples of Australia, this semantic specificity was less pronounced at the time of Hinsley and Holm's writing.

scholarly agenda that contributed in part to the waning of Boas's influence in the US, at least in terms of the ability of Boas and his followers to compete for support from the US federal government. "The demands for complete scientific materials to justify Congressional appropriations reflected the growing unhappiness," Hinsley and Holm explain, with the apparently useless and open-ended science of anthropology at the turn of the century" (Hinsley and Holm 1976, 314). And with this demise came the foreclosure of the broad and comprehensive vision of the social sciences Boas at once advocated and embodied.

V. BEFORE THE CAMERA, BEHIND THE CAMERA

FIGURE 21: Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, *Chronique d'un été* (1961)

SOURCE: Argos Films

In the summer of 1960, French sociologist-philosopher Edgar Morin and anthropologist-cinematographer Jean Rouch collaborated on their simply titled *Chronique d'un*

été ("Chronicle of a Summer"). The film opens with Rouch and Morin debating whether it's possible to act sincerely on camera before introducing a cast of untrained actors the filmmakers prompt to discuss French society and the possibility of working-class happiness. At the end of its 90 minutes, the Rouch and Morin show their subjects the resultant footage and invite them to comment on how "real" the movie felt to them. *Chronique d'un été* has since been hailed as a formative example of what is now known as *cinéma vérité*. Rouch himself coined the term to describe what was at the time a radical departure from prevailing cinematic norms. Eschewing *nouvelle vague* conventions like the voiceover, *cinéma vérité* sought what critic Bill Nichols calls a "fly on the wall" observational mode wherein those depicted come to forget the presence of the camera (Nichols 2001, 114).

At its very outset, *Chronique d'un été* demonstrates another important feature of *cinéma vérité*; namely, the unapologetic presence of the maker within the made. In this way, Rouch and Morin prevent the viewer from forgetting the fact that they're watching a film. Since at least Aristotle's explication of ancient Greek theater, the willing suspension of disbelief has been a *sine qua non* of much speculative fiction. The roots of this alternative lie perhaps with German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, who criticized Aristotelian catharsis as the sole goal of aesthetic experience. In his 1949 "Short Organum for the Theatre," Brecht instead calls in for "a type of theatre which *not only* releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself" (Brecht 1992, 190 emphasis added). A fervent Marxist, Brecht yearned for an "epic theatre" that would bring its audience face to face with their world as it is.

For Brecht, this project entailed a new approach to acting based on what he called the *Verfremdungseffekt* (translated "distancing" or "alienation effect"). The aim was to produce a representation that "allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Brecht 1992, 192). As such, "the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself" (Brecht 1992, 193).[17] Even if the actor "plays a man possessed he must not seem to be possessed himself, for how is the spectator to discover what possessed him if he does?" (Brecht 1992, 193).[18] To purists for whom art is allergic to politics, Brecht responds that humanity's "highest decisions are… fought out on earth, not in the heavens; in the 'external' world, not inside people's heads. Nobody can stand above the warring classes, for nobody can stand above the human race" (Brecht 1992, 196). "For art to be 'un-political,'" Brecht concludes, "means only to ally itself with the 'ruling' group" (Brecht 1992, 196).

Though he predates Brecht by several decades, Boas anticipates many of these concerns. Just as Brecht worked against total identification of audience and actor, so too does Boas create photographs that call attention to their status as photographs. While some of Boas's readers have linked such compositional strategies to an anthropological nostalgia for pristine Indigenous societies unsullied by European fingers, this is not the only available interpretation. Instead, Boas's choices might signal instead an awareness of the photograph *qua* photograph, of the affordances and limits of photography as a medium. To return to *cinéma*

[17] Noting Brecht's gendered language here.
[18] Brecht at times avoids the word "actor" altogether, preferring the term "demonstrator."

vérité, Boas's willingness to step inside the frame demonstrates the evenhandedness of his approach, which situates himself on the same plane as those he studies.

Of course, the differences between Boas and his subjects are profound and should not be underemphasized. We are left, then, with question of how Boas navigates this relationship of racial difference. The first step of such a process is to specify more clearly what a concept like "racism" *means*. Though critiqued earlier, Aristotle may prove helpful here. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes virtue as a mean between two extremes, "one of excess, one of deficiency" (Aristotle 1999, 27). For example, the virtue of bravery falls somewhere between the vices of foolhardiness, a vice of excess, and cowardice, a vice of deficiency. In this way, we might describe two racisms, one of excess and the other of deficiency. A racism of excess *overestimates* the differences between races, whereas a racism of deficiency *underestimates* these differences. The racism of excess is best represented by pseudoscientists like French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau, whose *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* ("Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races") argued for the intellectual superiority of the Aryan race and attributed civilizational decline to miscegenation.[19] The racism of deficiency, on the other hand, is best represented by Chief Justice John Roberts of the US Supreme Court, who in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* wrote, "the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race" (quoted in Greenhouse 2022, 130).[20]

[19] It is important to understand *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, written between 1853 and 1855, as a reaction to the republican aims of the February Revolution of 1848.
[20] For more on the "colorblind racism" Roberts espouses here, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's aptly titled *Racism without Racists* (Bonilla-Silva 2018).

If there is a Boasian virtue, then, perhaps it lies between these two poles. A committed anti-racist, Boas was adamant that whatever differences separated races from one another were cultural rather than biological origin—a radical opinion for his day. In this way, Boas rejected the scientific racism of Gobineau. At the same time, Boas recognized the very real gulf separating him from those he studied. But rather than seeing this gap as an insurmountable obstacle, Boas shows us instead that it can be traversed, if only intermittently and through great effort. Indeed, it was only after a deep immersion in Kwakiutl culture that Boas felt comfortable performing the Hamat'sa ceremony, and even then only in terms of its bodily enactment, removed from its original context just as Boas removed his clothes from his body until just in a loincloth. In their use of multiple perspectives, Boas's treatment of himself is strikingly reminiscent of the Indigenous communities he devoted his life to understanding. Studied and studied brought under a single rubric, with Boas belonging to neither, flickering in midair like a silvery liquid mirage.

CHAPTER FIVE:

TOWARD A SOCIAL THEORY OF THE IMAGE

I. MEDIA IN THREE AGES

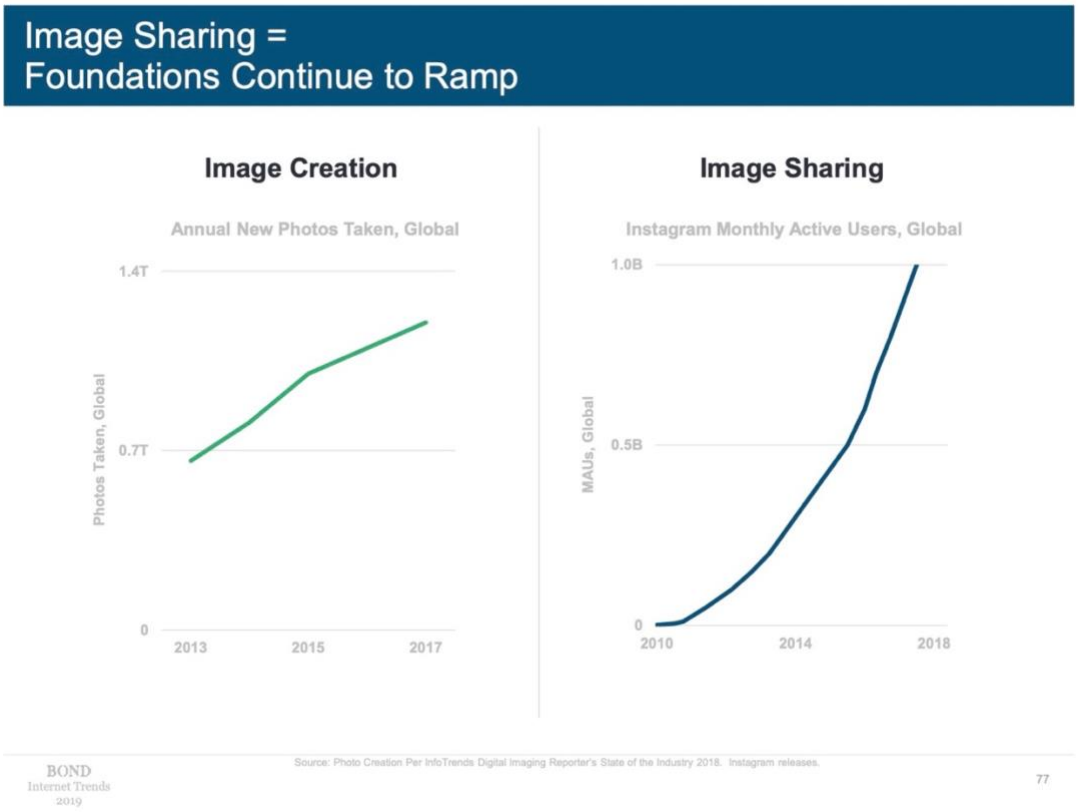

FIGURE 22: Mary Meeker, "Internet Trends 2019"

SOURCE: Kleiner Perkins

You are the image, and life has never been better. In her highly anticipated "Internet Trends Report," venture capitalist Mary Meeker estimated that in 2014 1.8 trillion photos were uploaded and shared daily through platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and others (Meeker 2014). Between 2013 to 2017, the number of new photographs almost doubled and may now well exceed 1.5 trillion annually (Meeker 2019). Instagram, the photo sharing platform *par excellence*, has grown near exponentially since its founding and in the eight years since its

founding topped 1 billion monthly active users (Meeker 2019). Not only have images taken the world by storm; their hold over us by all indicators seems only likely to increase. The need to theorize the image and its impact has never been stronger, but social scientists have been asleep at the wheel. Despite being founded by voracious thinkers like Georg Simmel, who wrote of money and the metropolis as seriously as art and fashion, social science has largely ceded the image to the humanities and various emerging interdisciplines (Simmel 1972a, 1972b, 2011, 2020). Doing so leaves a great deal of data on the table and thus undercuts our ability to explain human behavior in a robust and rigorous way.

Years	17,000 BP – 1826	1826 – 2003	2003 – present
Product	Painting	Photograph	Content
Figure	Artist	Consumer	Influencer
Barrier	High	Medium	Low

TABLE 1: The three ages of media

While there is inspiration enough in our disciplinary forefathers, it would be insufficient to revert to this moment (were such a return even possible). The world has changed irrevocably since their time and calls for new approaches. Just as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer saw in that rise of the culture industry necessitated a reworking of classical Marxism, so too does the rise of social media necessitate a reworking of the Frankfurt School and its legacy (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002). With the necessary caveat that all periodizations are artificial impositions, in this case some attempt to characterize the broad changes the creation and flow of images has undergone would be helpful. The first age of media begins approximately 17,000 years ago, the age of the wall paintings at Lascaux. Until the 19th-century, the technology of imagemaking experiences many refinements but remains virtually unchanged: the application of pigment to a surface. This is the era of the artist; its paradigmatic

product is the painting; it has a high barrier to entry. In 1826, inventor Nicéphore Niépce made *Point de vue du Gras* (*View from the Window at Le Gras*), the oldest surviving photograph, and hence liberated the image from its dependence on the hand through a process that would eventually become affordable enough to be accessible to the middle class. This is the era of the consumer; its paradigmatic product is the photograph; it has a medium barrier to entry. 2003 witnessed the launch of MySpace, the first social networking service to reach a global audience. The move online dematerialized the image into computer code and the decision to keep the site free broadened access beyond the middle class. Everyone was now a potential imagemaker. This is the era of the influencer; its paradigmatic product is content; it has a low barrier to entry.

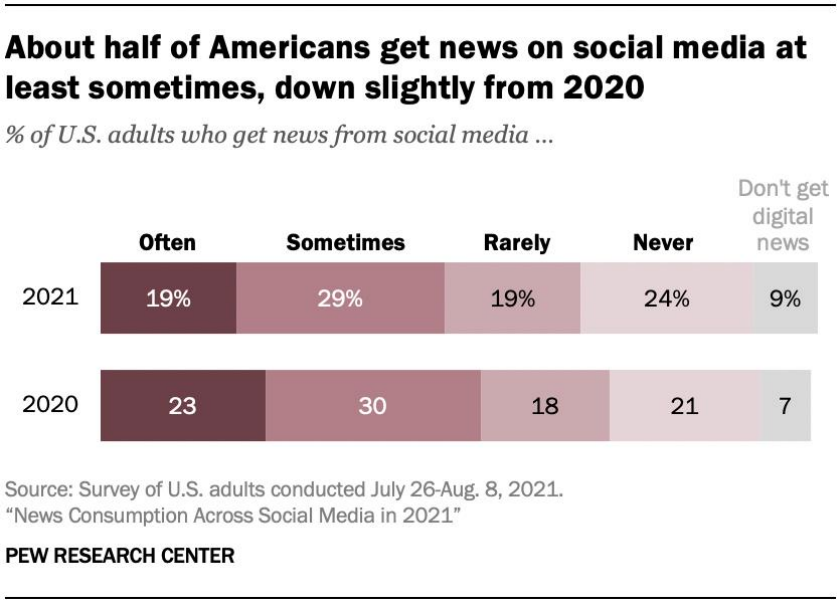

FIGURE 23: Walker and Masta, "News Consumption Across Social Media in 2021"

SOURCE: Pew Research Center

Since it is the one most likely to concern us due to its newness and currency, a few more words on the third age of media are in order. Let us take its two key terms, "content"

and "influencer" in turn. We might describe *content* as the material people contribute to the online world; it is media that is either intended or at least able to be viewed on a screen. Of course, the term is fabulously imprecise, which is in large part why it is a perfect descriptor of the current moment. Indeed, almost half of US adults got news from social media "at least sometimes" in 2021, one of many signs of an erosion of the boundaries between what were once distinct industries (Walker and Masta 2022).[1] Researchers have shown that those who use computers for learning have more difficulty understanding abstract ideas, perhaps because competition for the real estate of the screen is so fierce (Kaufman and Flanagan 2016). One of the ironies of the present, though, is how this great leveling has given (at least some) individuals more power.

[1] Other examples include the spread of the "blob" book cover design to game Amazon algorithms, or the diffusion of the "mumble rap" microgenre on the online audio distribution platform Soundcloud during the 2010s (Caramanica 2017; Hawley 2021).

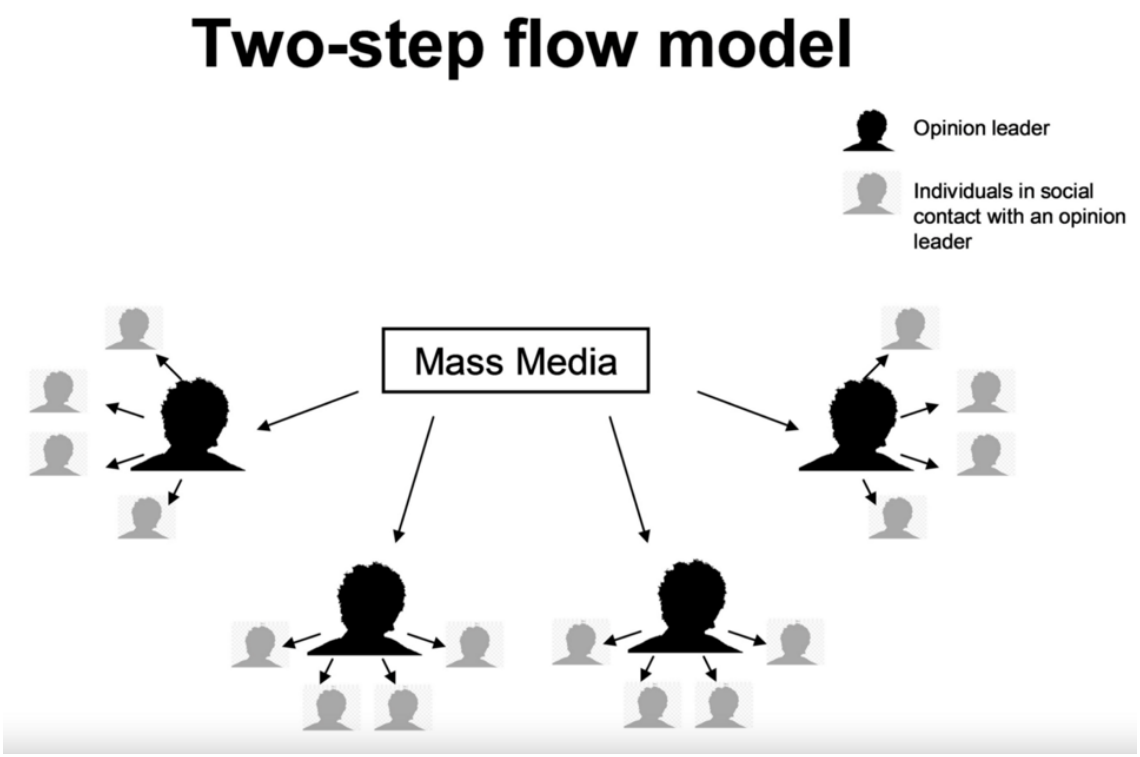

FIGURE 24: Two-step flow model (adapted from Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948)

SOURCE: communicationtheory.org

The concept of influence is nothing new, having been formalized by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in their study of the 1940 and 1944 US presidential elections, which presented their "two-step flow of communication" model (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 2021). In contrast to the earlier "hypodermic needle" model that assumed the public unblinkingly swallows whatever messages are aimed at them whole, Lazarsfeld and his co-authors found that most people were only indirectly affected by mass media, instead responding to it as filtered through opinion leaders (Lasswell 1927).[2] For

[2] Although the "hypodermic needle" or "magic bullet" theory is often associated with Lasswell's study of WWI propaganda, neither term is his, and may indeed have developed more as a straw argument intended to be disproven and rejected (Sproule 1989).

evidence of the contemporary relevance of these findings, look no further than testimonials, which have been a mainstay of advertising since at least 1849, when British chess master Howard Staunton endorsed a set of chess figures that continue to bear his name (Pandolfini 1992). More recently, however, political scientists Lance Bennett and Jarol Manheim have revived the "one-step flow of communication" due to advent of mass customization (Bennett and Manheim 2006). An increasingly important form of advertising, 74% of marketers planned to spend at least of a quarter of their social media budgets partnering with content creators in 2022 (Sprout Social 2022).

There is little consensus as to what constitutes an *influencer*, who have been defined as "a range of third parties who exercise influence over the organization and its potential customers," a "third party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision but may never be accountable for it," or simply people who are "well-connected, create an impact, have active minds, and are trendsetters" (Peck et al. 1999; Brown and Hayes 2008; Keller and Berry 2003). The brilliance of influencer marketing lies in how it confounds the distinction between the one- and two-step flow of communication models. Many influencers work directly with business are therefore not opinion leaders in the sense of interpreting mass media for lower-end media users as the two-step flow of communication model envisions. And yet, the decision of the social media user as to whom they follow also does not conform to the one-step model of a single generic message. The influencer is instead a benchmark, however unrealistic. This impulse is the driving force behind Leon Festinger's social comparison theory, which revolves around the belief that individuals are driven to evaluate themselves accurately and compare themselves to others as an exercise in self-definition (Festinger 1954). Ostensibly

"just another social media user," the influencer is at once product and seller, an embodiment of the unstable antinomies of our current media landscape.

While the image producer–consumer has gone mainstream in the form of the influencer, it is also nothing new.[3] Strictly speaking, the two roles have always potentially coincided, but practically they have long not. During the first age of media, the artist was seldom able to retain ownership of their work. Indeed, securing a patron was a primary goal of the artist in Renaissance Italy, the heyday of patronage. As sociologist Bram Kempers has shown, this period resulted in the professionalization of the artist, and gave political rulers an opportunity to demonstrate their power (Kempers 1992). Little changed initially in the transition to the second age of media; production was limited to elites, though ones distinguished by their technical rather than artistic expertise. Over the course of the second age, the ambit of image production gradually increased, but this expansion was limited by two distinct but related factors: money and material.

As previously argued, photography liberated imagemaking from the hand, but not from materiality altogether. The photographic image was, as Walter Benjamin saw, infinitely reproducible, which greatly extended its reach (Benjamin 1969). Nevertheless, the photograph was still bound to the paper on which it is printed, which costs money, in addition to chemicals, labor, etc. This is not to say there were no changes during the second age of media. Perhaps most important is the invention of the television, which further spread the image. Within its four corners, the television set could produce a seemingly infinite number of images, first in

[3] In this section, I do not use the term "consumer" here in the narrower sense of the last section.

grayscale but not long thereafter in living color. And yet, information flowed in a single direction: from producer to consumer. Regardless of whether it took one, two, or *n* steps, the ability of the individual to "speak back" to mass media was miniscule at best. But this was about to change.

II. THE SOCIALIZATION OF MEDIA

It is 1989 and Tim Berners-Lee is very frustrated. He is a fellow at the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN), or "European Organization for Nuclear Research," which then operated the world's largest particle physics laboratory, as it still does today. A key difficulty that confronted Berners-Lee at the time was how to find information stored on different computers (May 2019). With help from CERN colleague Robert Cailliau, Berners-Lee published a project proposal called the "World Wide Web" the following year that would combine hypertext and the internet (Berners-Lee and Cailliau 1990). Shortly thereafter, Berners-Lee and his team built the HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP), the HyperText Markup Language (HTML), the first web browser, the first web server, and the first website (CERN 2015).

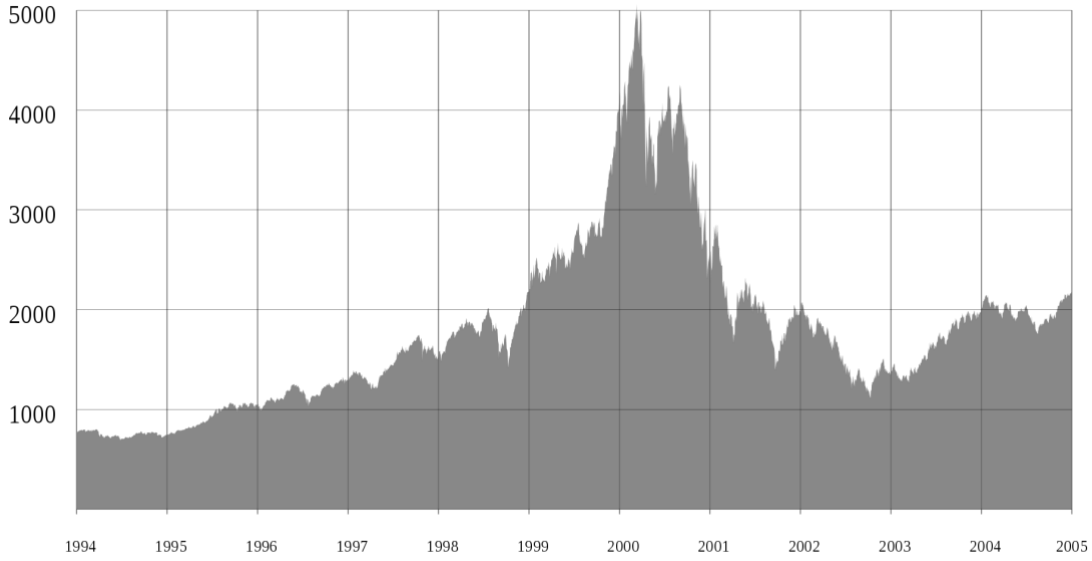

FIGURE 25: NASDAQ Composite index from 1994 to 2005

SOURCE: openvc.app

In January 1991, the first web servers outside CERN were switched on. Within the next two years, 50 websites were created (Hopgood 2001). In 1993, CERN made Web protocol and code freely available, thus enabling its widespread adoption (CERN 1993). 1993 also saw the launch of Mosaic, one of the first widely available web browsers, developed by the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and websites sprang up by the thousands (Couldry 2012). Part-time NCSA employee Marc Andreessen founded the Netscape Communications Corporation, which incorporated Java and JavaScript into its proprietary Navigator web browser and was the first attempt to capitalize on the World Wide Web (Lashinsky 2005). When Netscape went public in 1995, it sparked the dot-com bubble, which would peak in 2000 (McCullough 2015). Microsoft responded by bundling its competing Internet Explorer (IE) into Windows, thus

inaugurating the first "browser war" that would make IE the dominant browser for 14 years (Calore 2009). This period would retrospectively come to be known as Web 1.0. Like television, Web 1.0 still envisioned its users as passive observers, not unlike the reader of a newspaper. In other words, Web 1.0 modernized but did not revolutionize.

FIGURE 26: "Tag cloud" of Web 2.0 themes

SOURCE: Markus Angermeier and Luca Cremonini

But with Web 2.0, the walls came crashing down. In his introduction to new media, Terry Flew described the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 as a "move from personal websites to blogs and blog site aggregation, from publishing to participation, from web content as the outcome of large up-front investment to an ongoing and interactive process, and from content management systems to links based on 'tagging'" (Flew 2008, 19). A key contributor to this

development was the rise of social media, interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, and interests through virtual communities and networks (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Obar and Wildman 2015). Social network services are almost as old as the World Wide Web itself with the advent of Classmates, GeoCities, and SixDegrees in 1994, 1995, and 1997, respectively (Ngak 2011). One of the most successful early platforms, Friendster garnered three million users within the first few months of its 2003 launch and became particularly successful in Asia (Rivlin 2006; Schiffman 2008). Partially in protest of Friendster's "real name" policy, Tom Anderson, Chris DeWolfe, and Jon Hart founded MySpace in 2003 (Agger 2009).

FIGURE 27: *Time* 2006 "Person of the Year" issue cover

SOURCE: *Time* Magazine (December 25, 2006)

In true Web 2.0 fashion, MySpace was distinguished by its customizability, giving the erstwhile passive consumer an unprecedented ability to affect what they saw online, which fostered explosive growth, especially when coupled with the commitment to keep the site free. When News Corporation acquired it two years later, MySpace had 16 million monthly users (Siklos 2005). On August 6, 2006, the 100 millionth MySpace account was created (Adest 2006). Alongside the launching of other Web 2.0 sites like Wikipedia in 2001 and YouTube in 2005, the success of MySpace led *Time* magazine to proclaim "You" as their 2006 Person of the Year, complete with a reflective mylar pane appearing as a video player window. In the issue, lead technology writer Lev Grossman explained, "It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before…. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world but also change the way the world changes" (Grossman 2006). But limelight is fickle. In a story that has been since immortalized in a critically acclaimed movie, Mark Zuckerberg coded what would soon become Facebook in early 2004 while a sophomore at Harvard College (Hoffman 2008). While it's difficult to determine the cause of MySpace's demise definitively, a common explanation is that MySpace stubbornly clung to its "portal strategy" of building an audience around the entertainment industries, Facebook constantly added new features (Barnett 2010; Chmielewski and Sarno 2009). In other words, Facebook understood the fundamentally *social* character of social media; that users must be constantly stimulated to be retained.

III. PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE ICONOGRAPHY

The image has never not been social. Even in the first age of media, the production of the image hinged in large part on the relationship between artist and patron. What sense does

it make, then, to speak of "gradations of the social"? Either something is or is not social; one cannot be a little bit social just as one cannot be a little bit pregnant. Indeed, this totalizing vision of the social is the impetus behind the foundation of the social sciences, at least as advocated by Durkheim, who asserts, "Society requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests. And it subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations, and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible" (Durkheim 1995, 209). Consider the example of a writer who never publishes or shows their work to anyone, who locks it away in a desk drawer never to be seen of again. Can we say this creation avoids the social and must thus be understood solely on its own terms? In a sense, we cannot. One would assume this hypothetical manuscript to be written in a language its author learnt from others; written on paper and with ink that came from elsewhere, which themselves embody social processes of production, transportation, and exchange. It is, in short, social "all the way down." But there is also another scene of the social. Let us return to our furtive author with drawers full of secret manuscripts. There are many reasons why one might write, including but not limited to pleasure, money, fame, etc. By withholding their manuscripts from the broader world, certain motivations become more difficult to defend. For example, it is difficult to imagine why someone seeking to become a renowned writer would limit the potential reach of their work so drastically. This is the sense of the social operative here.

Again, the image has never not been social. But if it were possible to ignore the social dimension of the image during the first and second ages of media, this has since become impossible. As of January 2023, there were 4.76 billion social media users around the world, constituting 59.4% of the global population (Kemp 2023). Indeed, the adjective "social" is half

of the term "social media" itself. And yet, we have also seen how the birth of Web 2.0 has inaugurated a world without precedent in human history. Amid these profound changes, one must ask whether the canon of social theory ought to be cast aside, disregarded as having nothing to say to us and unceremoniously thrown out like so much bathwater. But before we do, it might behoove us to pause to consider the possible points of similarity between these figures and our current situation. As stated above, the producer–consumer of images is not new, though it has gone mainstream during the third age of media. In terms of the academy, however, it might make the more sense to refer more narrowly to the sort of consumption that scholars undertake; namely, analysis.

This dissertation has focused on three such image producer–analysts across the social sciences: Pierre Bourdieu, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Franz Boas. All three studied images across a range of media while also making images themselves. As such, they offer a rare opportunity to ascertain how the theory and practice of media converge with and diverge from one another. To boot, all three made images in the same medium: photography. This sharing allows us to make comparisons across the three by contrasting how each navigated the medium differently. A final point of commonality is how each of these Europeans was affected by the colonial contexts in which they worked. Frenchman Pierre Bourdieu spent his early career in Algeria, where he was deployed during that country's struggle for independence. Compatriot Claude Lévi-Strauss completed his only fieldwork not in a French colony but a Portuguese one: Brazil. Despite this detail, Lévi-Strauss was in many ways the quintessential European explorer, bespectacled and pith-helmeted, speaking through multiple interpreters. Fellow European Franz Boas was born and educated in Germany but spent the bulk of his

professional life in the United States and maintained a particular interest in the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Alarmed by what he perceived as the imminent disappearance of these peoples under the pressure of colonization, Boas and his students engaged in a process of "salvage ethnography" to record and document these vanishing cultures.

One of the analytic benefits of the colonial context (if we could perversely speak of the "benefits" of such a context) is how it has the potential to throw taken-for-granted assumptions into sharp relief. Often, we move through culture as a fish through water, unaware of our surroundings because they are part of us. But I focus on periods when each of these thinkers were outside of their home countries, at times on the other side of the world. In addition, the contexts on which I focus are ones of extreme alterity and inequality. It is difficult to overstate the profound power differential that characterized these encounters. By foreground these moments, I hope to access those "unsettled times" wherein more culture is called upon and made visible (Swidler 1986). This orientation provides unique access to the thought of these social scientists and allows us to separate the wheat from the chaff.

I now turn to each of my case studies in turn and mine them for their most important insights, which I formalize into a series of hypotheses intended to guide future research in these areas in an epistemologically sound way.

H1: Images must be understood in relation to their social use.

Let us begin with Bourdieu. Bourdieu began *lycée* in Pau but finished in Paris, at the famed Lycée Louis-le-Grand, which has long educated the French elites. From there, Bourdieu gained entrance to the École Normale Supérieure, the very apex of the French educational

system. Here, Bourdieu would study philosophy with Louis Althusser, who dedicated his life to the elaboration of Marxist concepts like ideology. In his canonical "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser envisioned a process whereby social and political institutions metaphorically "hail" the individual, thus providing subjects with their identities. In this way, the situation precedes the individual, who is "always-already interpellated" as subject (Althusser 2001). While the relationship between Althusser and what would come to be called structuralism is a complicated one, the reading of Marx he and his students advocated for has generally been described as a "structural Marxism" which emphasizes the how the state is not directly controlled by the ruling class, but rather functions to ensure the viability of capitalism in general (Smith 1984).

This background is important insofar as it sheds light on Bourdieu's preoccupations, which in turn lead us to those most productive moments of his thought. The brilliance of Bourdieu lies in how he was able to extend the purview of structural Marxism into culture, which many theretofore believed to be opaque to social science. Through concepts like field, capital, and *habitus*, Bourdieu created a realm that operated by the sorts of impersonal laws that Althusser argued turned the wheels of capitalism. It is this radical deemphasis of the individual that allows Bourdieu, normally supremely thoughtful, to write a book as heavy-handed as *Un art moyen*. But even his magnum opus *Distinction* dazzles us with its erudition and unearthing of hidden systems even as the story it tells is as old as the hills: the domination of the lower classes by the upper; always, everywhere, and without exception (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu offers an important contribution through this analysis, but it isn't the whole story. Indeed, we might read the Manet lectures as his realization toward the end of his life that

structures are less totalizing, and individuals a more important unit of analysis, than he originally supposed. We must not ignore the sociality of the image, but we must also not assume that this one dimension exhausts its possibilities.

H2: Images must be understood in relation to other images.

While a contemporary of Bourdieu, Claude Lévi-Strauss had a much different experience of 20th-century France. A Jew, Lévi-Strauss was denaturalized and dismissed from his *lycée* post under the Vichy racial laws after France capitulated in 1940 (Lewis 2020). Finding himself in New York the following year, Lévi-Strauss joined the New School for Social Research, where he formed the *École libre des hautes études* "university-in-exile" with other expatriate Europeans like Roman Jakobson, who was to have a profound and long-lasting impact on Lévi-Strauss. A pioneer of structural linguistics, Jakobson conceived of language as a self-contained and self-regulating system whose elements are defined by their relationships to one another (Martinet 1989; Matthews 2014). It was this structural approach that allowed Lévi-Strauss to see past the content of family relations to ascertain their form in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which quickly catapulted him to academic fame (Lévi-Strauss 1969).

While Jakobsonian structuralism resonated well with discrete kin ties, Lévi-Strauss would push the approach much further in *Mythologiques*, his sprawling study tracing the iterations of a single myth across the Americas. Based on the assumption that "myth is language," Lévi-Strauss dissolved myths into a series of dichotomies (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 210). In *The Raw and the Cooked*, whose very title is one of these oppositions, Lévi-Strauss describes "how empirical categories—such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, etc.… can… be used as conceptual tools which

to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions" (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 1). Hence, Lévi-Strauss advocates what we might call a hermeneutic holism, whereby any one part of a culture can only be properly understood in relation to the whole of that culture. Even if his reductionism ultimately descends into "a sort of cargo-cult fetish of mathematical formalism," Lévi-Strauss demonstrates the value and importance of interpretively centering context, how all things are defined by both what they are and what they are not (Appiah 2020).

H3: Images must be understood in relation to the intentions of their creators.

Of all my cases, Franz Boas has perhaps the most unusual intellectual development. His academic background was in the natural, rather than social, sciences. Boas earned his doctorate in physics with a dissertation at the University of Kiel entitled *Contributions to the Perception of the Color of Water* on the absorption, reflection, and polarization of light in water (Cole 1999, 53, 298). In this research, Boas investigated changes in the color produced when light interacted with different types of water (Williams 1998, 57). Difficulties he experienced perceiving slight differences, however, piqued Boas's interest in perception and measurement (Williams 1998, 57). While he would consider shifting his focus to psychophysics (study of the relationship between stimuli and sensation), Boas would ultimately stick with geography, which he had pursued as a minor field at Kiel (Liss 1996, 174; Williams 1998, 57).

Though Boas did not pursue a career as a physicist, we can hear the echoes of this preoccupation with the mutability of perception throughout his oeuvre. Just as Boas noted the impossibility of visually representing three-dimensional subjects on two-dimensional surfaces in *Primitive Art*, so too did he accept the impossibility of there being a single photograph that could fully depict any subject. But rather than causing him to abandon photography, this

limitation had the opposite effect: the proliferation of images from multiple viewpoints, with the hope that the wholeness of the subject could be reapproximated after the fact. The impossibility of representation, however, has an important effect: If there is no one "successful" image, then any image that exists is a unique record of what its creator chose to prioritize. Ergo, the intention of the creator is an unavoidable influence on the form of the image and must be included in our analyses.

IV. FORGOTTEN BEAUTY

At some point in 2011, a Facebook content moderator came across the image of an African teenager breastfeeding a young goat. The practice of human–animal breastfeeding has a long history and continues to be practiced in some cultures (Simoons and Baldwin 1982). In this case, a way of surviving drought in countries like Kenya is to have a lactating woman "her nurse the kid, the baby goat, along with her human kid" (Adler 2018). Facebook has long faced criticism for removing images of breastfeeding as violations of its "no nudity policy," which immediately raises a definitional problem. A Facebook employee recalls, "the first cut at it was visible male and female genitalia. And then visible female breasts," which only kicked the can down the road a bit since one needs to determine how much of a breast needs to be showing to constitute nudity (Adler 2018).

Facebook ultimately decided that "if you could see essentially the nipple and areola, then that's nudity" (Adler 2018). While this worked for situations wherein "the child was blocking the view of the nipple and the areola," what about images where the baby isn't actively breastfeeding? Facebook eventually added an "attachment clause," which specified that the baby's lips needed to touch the woman's nipple. As expected, moderators began to receive

images of "breastfeeding porn" and realized they needed "some kind of an age cap," deciding that "if it looked like the child could walk on his or her own, then too old" (Adler 2018). Facing protests from its users, Facebook decided in 2013 that "the baby no longer needed to have its mouth physically touching the nipple of the woman" and that "one nipple and/or areola could be visible in the photo" (Adler 2018). The following year, Facebook further liberalized this policy, "so that both nipples or both areolae may be present in the photo" (Adler 2018).

With this brief history in mind, let us return to 2011. There *is* physical contact between the mouth and the nipple, but is the goat an infant? Can it walk? A Facebook employee admits, "Breastfeeding, as we intended anyway, meant human infants" (Adler 2018). Due to these and other unforeseen liminal cases, Facebook employees had to constantly update its censorship rules, amending them "up to 20 times a month" (Adler 2018). While many of these problems are quite logical consequences of occupying the unenviable position of global content moderation, this episode introduces a heretofore underexamined topic: the capacity of the image to evoke *emotion*. Although emotions have been analytically present in sociology since at least the small group studies of Alexander Hare, these have largely been understood as attributes of individuals (Hare 1976). For example, Randall Colins explores how rituals like sex and smoking can create and discharge emotional energy (Collins 2005).

Emotion and censorship have been frequent companions historically, at least in terms of law. In Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 is perhaps the earliest example.[4] The case *Regina v Hicklin* codified the law into the eponymous "Hicklin test,"

[4] 20 & 21 Vict. c.83.

whereby obscene materials was that which tended "to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences" (1868).[5] Across the Atlantic, the US Supreme Court took up these same issues in *Roth v. United States*, which limited censorship to material "utterly without redeeming social importance," meaning "whether, to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest."[6] And yet, this "prurient interest" has been difficult to pin down, leading Justice Potter Stewart to memorably proclaim "I know it when I see it" with regard to hard-core pornography.[7]

This photography from 2011, then, poses an interpretive problem, insofar as the same image can provoke two different responses, distinguished primarily by its emotional effect (in the case of pornography, the capacity to arouse sexually). But far from being new, the emotiveness of the image has a long history, particularly in aesthetics. Take perhaps the most important practitioner of this field: Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant differentiates beauty from mere agreeableness.[8] He engages in a thought experiment wherein if a man "says that sparkling wine from the Canaries is agreeable, someone else would improve his expression and remind him that he should say 'It is agreeable *to me*,'" insofar as "everyone has his own taste" (Kant 2000, 97 emphasis omitted).[9] However, "If he pronounces that

[5] L.R. 3 Q.B. 360 (1868).
[6] Roth v. United States, 354 U.S. 476 (1957).
[7] Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U. S. 184 (1964).
[8] The *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, translated alternately as the *Critique of Judgment* and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, is occasionally referred to as the "third critique," as Kant wrote it after his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*) and *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*).
[9] Even though Kant is speaking hypothetically here, I flag his use of gendered language.

something to is beautiful, then he expects the very same satisfaction of others; he judges not merely for himself, but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things" (Kant 2000, 98). In this way, aesthetic judgment is for Kant an irrevocably *social* exercise. A crucial feature of this linkage is what he calls *sensus communis*.[10]

Kant is careful to differentiate *sensus communis* from "common human understanding, which, as merely healthy (not yet cultivated) understanding, is regarded as the least that can be expected from anyone who lays claim to the name of a human being" and "is encountered everywhere," such that having it "is certainly not an advantage or an honor" (Kant 2000, 173 emphasis omitted). *Sensus communis*, on the other hand, is a "*communal* sense… that in its reflection takes account… of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order… to hold its judgment up to a human reason as a whole" (Kant 2000, 173). In so doing, *sensus communis* "avoids the illusion which, from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment" (Kant 2000, 173–4). Kant envisions a process whereby "one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own

[10] *Sensus communis* is neither German nor English, but Latin. Kant tends to use either *sensus communis* or its German equivalent *Gemeinsinn* to describe aesthetic judgment, thus differentiating his position from that of realist philosopher Thomas Reid and his followers, who have come to be known as the Scottish school of common sense. When referring to these views, Kant uses various terms such as *gemeinen Menschenverstand*, *gesunden Verstand*, or *gemeinen Verstand*, all of which strike closer to the everyday sense of "common sense" in English. To underscore this distinction, Kant's translators have usually opted to translate *Gemeinsinn* as *sensus communis* (Rosenfeld 2011).

judging" (Kant 2002, 174). In other words, to judge is for Kant to identify with a certain community or, barring this, to imagine such a community.

Judgment, then, reveals what Kant elsewhere in the third critique calls a *Weltanschauung* (literally "worldview," sometimes translated "intuition of the world"). Kant relies upon the metaphor of infinity to describe what this term signifies for him. As a number greater than any number, infinity is strictly speaking a contradiction in terms, but one we are nevertheless able to think. For Kant, this "indicates a faculty of the mind which surpasses every standard of sense" or "requires a faculty in the human mind that is itself supersensible" (Kant 2000, 138). This proposal admits "of no intuition though it is presupposed as the substratum of the intuition of the world [*Weltanschauung*] as mere appearance" (Kant 2000, 138). Hence, "the infinite of the sensible world is completely comprehended in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude under a concept, even though it can never be completely thought in the mathematical estimation of magnitude through numerical concepts" (Kant 2000, 138). In this way, the ability "to think the infinite of supersensible intuition… surpasses any standard of sensibility" and "as an enlargement of the mind… feels itself empowered to overstep the limits of sensibility from another… point of view" (Kant 2000, 138).

In other words, the *Weltanschauung* is less some discrete thought or even group of thoughts, but more that which undergirds thinking *tout court*. As a concept, *Weltanschauung* lives and dies by its imprecision, especially as refracted through social science. The introduction of a paper stemming from the Conference on World Views admits that the concept "is itself somewhat vague," which "explains why some students of culture prefer to ignore the notion of world view altogether and to concentrate instead on the directly observable institutions and

practices of a culture" (Jones 1972, 79). And yet, conference organizer W.T. Jones asserts "that something fundamental about a culture is missed when one looks at it only as a set of observable practices and institutions"; namely, "the dynamics of the culture—the complex of motivations, perceptions, and sets that animates all of these various practices and institutions, thereby making them one culture" (Jones 1972, 79). He ultimately concludes that if "something is sacrificed in the way of precision and rigor, something is also gained in understanding by admitting such concepts into our explanatory scheme" (Jones 1972, 79).

Indeed, *Weltanschauung* is attractive for present purposes in how it brings together so many dimensions of our analysis. More specifically, the introduction of this concept helps us make sense of the Facebook episode. For this content moderator, the unexpected image of the African teenager breastfeeding a baby goat could only be pornographic. But as far as mistakes go, this one is completely understandable—the censor and the censored in this case do not share a world, let alone a world view. Nestled in a routine yet comfortable white-collar job, there is no reason that the Facebook employee should be familiar with the reality of drought and famine, or of the intimate and symbiotic relationship between human and animal life that develops amid extreme poverty. And yet, through the work of understanding, the viewer of this image can see the image with new eyes, its meaning totally different though nothing *about* the image has changed. The emotivity of the image falls away, to be replaced either by another (or not). Accordingly, we might add one more hypothesis to the preceding three:

H4: Images must be understood in relation to whether and how they evoke emotional responses, which varies across time and space.

In other words, the image and its interpretation help to define the boundaries of a *community*.

A photograph of a waifish model in a commercial advertisement might serve as an object of desire, an inspirational role model, or a reminder of financial deprivation.[11] Just as Stuart Hall and others held subject and image to be mutually constitutive, so too are the image and community. By sharing and receiving images, community boundaries are mapped, contested, and redefined with profound implications for both media and our place within it.[12]

V. WHERE ALL ROADS LEAD

On May 10, 1975, the Sony Group Corporation released Betamax in Japan. Four years previous, Sony had introduced U-matic, the world's first videocassette format. Though groundbreaking, its high cost ultimately proving to be its downfall (Museum of Obsolete Media 2023). When Sony representatives demonstrated a prototype of the system in 1974, they expected that other electronics manufacturers would fall into line behind Betamax for the good of all. The Japan Victor Company (JVC), however, had different plans, developing their own competing Video Home System (VHS) to prevent Sony from dominating the videotape market (Howells 2005, 76–81). While many consumers believed Betamax to be a superior format due to a very successful advertising campaign, they still preferred VHS due to its lower price point and longer recording times. Within five years, JVC had cornered 60% of the North American market, spelling the beginning of the end of this "format war."

A format is like a medium but different. In his freewheeling *After Art*, historian David Joselit defines formats as "dynamic mechanisms for aggregating content" (Joselit 2013, 55). In

[11] Consider, for instance, the proliferation of "thinspo" (portmanteau of *thin* and *inspiration*) images on various websites that promote anorexia and other forms of disordered eating (Borzekowski et al., 2011).

[12] A recent study in this area is Nicole Morse's *Selfie Aesthetics*, which investigates how trans feminine artists use selfies to explore identity and gender transition (Morse 2022).

mediums, "a material substrate (such as paint on canvas) converges with an aesthetic tradition (such as painting)" (Joselit 2013, 55). Whereas mediums "lead to objects, and thus reification," formats "are nodal connections and differential fields" that "channel an unpredictable array of ephemeral currents and charges" and "configurations of force rather than discrete objects" (Joselit 2013, 55). The fundamental feature of the format is its ability to *translate* material into its own terms. While this necessitates a certain narrowing (e.g., the span of the medium of video is wider than that of the VHS format), it produces a paradoxical widening at the same time (e.g., a VHS tape can circulate more widely than a Betamax tape). In this way, the format represents a shift in our cultural landscape even if it does not signify a radical break (if such definitive moments truly exist).

Freed from the limits of the material substrate, the format serves as sort of megaphone amplifying the reach and power of the visual further than ever before. From QAnon to George Floyd, the proliferation of images during the third age of media has profound social and political implications that we ignore at our peril. If academic social science is to pursue the aim of making sense of the world around us, it must not leave these questions to humanistic scholars. In the beginning, formats like the VHS tape did not yet depart widely from the medium; it is possible to store a movie, documentary, or commercial on a videocassette, but not a novel or painting. Under Web 2.0, however, no such promises can be made. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and their ilk are venues for poetry and advertisement, pornography and politics, and much we have yet to see. These are the unpredictable "currents and charges" Joselit envisions. Given this volatility, the need for analytic clarity in these areas has arguably never been greater.

In this third age of media, we find ourselves in a sort of Wild West. The rise of algorithms prevent the sorts of universal messaging imagined by models like the "hypodermic needle" theory. One might have picked up a newspaper of old expecting to find news, if not always truth, but newspapers today combine investigative reporting with branded content, and are often no longer even appear on newsprint. Now we live in a skeuomorphic world wherein computer "desktops" are organized into "folders" and other relics of a quickly vanishing office (Eavis, Creswell, and Rennison 2022). With a view to getting a handle on the situation we find ourselves in, this dissertation has gone backward to go forward, returning to some of the key figures who have influenced how we think about the relationship between images and human social life. This revisiting has produced a few key hypotheses intended to guide future research. The first of these, from Bourdieu, emphasizes the *social* dimension of images. The second, from Lévi-Strauss, emphasizes the *formal* dimension of images. The third, from Boas, emphasizes the *personal* dimension of images. The last, my own creation by way of Kant, emphasizes the *emotional* dimension of images. As a concept, the format is useful insofar as it brings all four of these dimensions under a single rubric. The newspaper was just for news, at least in theory. But the VHS tape kicked the door much wider open. With the birth of MySpace, though, the barndoor has been blown off its hinges.

In many ways, this dissertation has sought to shift the conversation around images away from single-factor determinism toward a more realistic and defendable account of how images *matter* in our current historical moment. And yet, this same critique might be levied against me, inasmuch as my intervention relies upon partial readings of my cases that admittedly do not provide (nor even attempt) to offer comprehensive portraits. In part, this

partiality has been practical, since pronouncing the final word on even one of these thinkers would consume the space of several monographs, were it possible at all. We have, however, traded depth for breadth, in the process providing ourselves with the opportunity to compare a couple examples of the interaction between a couple related themes. It is possible to preemptively defend any comparative study, though, and is hence not an ostensibly strong response to such an objection. In this case, however, this point is uniquely relevant. None of my figures lived to witness the third age of media, and their insights are of course hemmed in by the limits of that perspective. Sitting as we are upon their shoulders, one might hope to see a bit further, a bit clearer.

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