

Bill Wolff

Core 2: Research Methods for Writers

Object Analysis in the Style of *Harper's Magazine* Annotations

Assignment Overview

In her Introduction to *Things that Talk*, Lorraine Datson has observed that the “language of things derives from certain properties of the things themselves, which suit the cultural purposes for which they are enlisted” (p. 15). The authors allow the things being analyzed to talk through discussions of their unique, complex, and often-contradictory socio-cultural histories, and the implications of their socio-cultural uses.

So, too (and, perhaps, even more so), do we see such talkative things in *Harper's Magazine* Annotations. These double-page spread articles use an object or group of objects to ground an historical and socio-cultural discussion and analysis of both the object itself and the implications of the object. As such, an Annotation about bootleg Obama t-shirts becomes a discussion about appropriation of image in the African-American community with nods to issues of race, racism, slavery, propaganda, community identity, and so on. An Annotation about a Google server farm schematic becomes as discussion of the power consumption required by our insatiable data byte consumption, which has environmental, cultural, political, and geographical implications.

For this assignment, I would like you to create your own *Harper's*-like Annotation in which you discuss and analyze the socio-cultural histories and implications of an object (or related objects) directly relating to your research topic. Choose your object carefully; as Datson warns there are talkative things and there are silent things. The talkative have and evoke a kind of tension among various social, historical, political, and other forces. Search for that kind of object.

Assignment Specifics

- The object can be anything as long as a digital representation of it can be made so that you will be able to add it your paper.
- Though you do not need to lay the Annotation out as it is laid out in *Harper's* (see below if you would like to), I would like you to think in terms of the section's primary characteristic: call-outs pointing and relating to specific portions of the object.
- Please compose 6 call-outs, each with 150 – 175 words
- Please lay your document out in the following order:
 - Include a title and subtitle centered at the top of the page
 - Below the title and subtitle, include a digital representation of the object (that is, a photograph, a scanned object, and so on).
 - Below the image, include your 6 callouts. They should be single spaced, with one space between them.
 - Note by way of parenthetical statement at the beginning or end of each call-out what part of the object the call-out would be pointing to.
- If you would like, you are more than welcome to create a layout like those used in *Harper's* Annotations using Adobe InDesign, Quark, Scribus (a free, open source

layout program downloadable at <http://www.scribus.net/>), or other layout software. If you choose to do so, you are solely responsible for using and learning the software; we will not discuss them at all in class. You can achieve a similar effect using Microsoft Word, as well, but we will not discussing that, either.

- Please use Time New Roman, font size 12, 1" margins all around.

Due Dates

3/24: Bring your object to class (digital version is fine)

4/7: Document Analysis due by class-time to BW via email (send in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format)