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Great Brook in Autumn by Frank Gorga
This photograph is, to me, a reminder of the serenity of the autumn woods: clean crisp air, the rushing of water in a stream and the lack of insects make autumn the best time of year in the forests of New England. I spent time over a few days scouting locations along Great Brook and waiting for bright but diffuse light in the woods.
Bridgewater Review

On the cover Fall Foliage – Breaking Storm Photograph by Frank Gorga
This photograph is another example of luck – being in the right place at the right time. My wife and I headed down the lake (towards where our car was parked) in our canoe as a storm abated. I noticed the “interesting” light developing and we paddled faster. As we arrived on the far shore I went running off to this beaver swamp knowing that the light would be dramatic on the autumn foliage but that it might not last. I had time to press the shutter twice before the magic was gone.

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Editor’s Notebook

William C. Levin

Getting Out

My wife and I recently drove to Canada and wound our way through Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island and back home through New Brunswick and Maine. (Watch out! Here comes the travelogue part.) The Canadians we met were, as advertized, friendly and laid back compared with your average Bostonian. In Truro, one young man even stopped his car when he saw us fussing with a map and insisted on leading us right to our destination. We were sure it was well out of his way. Be sure to visit Hopewell Rocks at the tip of the Bay of Fundy for the huge (forty-foot) tidal show. The Cabot Trail at the northern end of Cape Breton is jaw-droppingly beautiful. Prince Edward Island’s farmland is picture book lovely, and in the town of Cavendish, fans of Anne of Green Gables can relive their childhood fantasies. (We were startled by the busloads of Japanese women who came halfway across the globe to see where the redhead Ann defied convention but still came to be beloved.) Oh, by the way, eat the Poutine, (French fries with brown gravy and melted cheese curds on top), at your own risk. Even Canadians consider it “heart attack on a plate.” My wife contends that adding chunks of lobster to Poutine, as they do in Nova Scotia, does not turn it into a seafood dish.

Sounds like your garden variety vacation drive, right? It turned out to be anything but. You see, this was our first trip since Jeanne and I retired this summer, she after 20 years as a librarian and me after 38 years professing at Bridgewater. Once home, as we sorted our pictures and wrote a trip narrative, we realized that...
this trip felt clearly different than our previous vacations. Namely, this was not a vacation at all.

Sociologists who study social roles, aging, and work and leisure all agree that a vacation is something people do to get away from everyday responsibilities so that they can return to them afterwards, supposedly with greater energy and enthusiasm. In short, vacations have utility. The trip my wife and I took was an end in itself. No recharging, renewing or rejuvenating. No re-anythinging. Man, was it novel, and (as our grandson says) "so fun."

This trip also reinforced for me a sociological fact that I have been emphasizing to my students throughout my career. When we try to make sense of our experiences we spend way too much effort examining what people are like as individuals and way too little understanding the situations in which they find themselves. My wife and I are still essentially the same people as we were when, over the years, we vacationed in Spain, Italy, England, Florida, California or the Berkshires. Jeanne still loves the unexpected, last-minute, side trip to a place she has discovered in an obscure pamphlet or web site. I still am pretty much fed up with travel after ten days, no matter where we are or how much fun we are having. What has changed is that now we are retired folks, and that means everything we do needs a new reading to fit our new lives.

Here’s another example of this idea of “looking to the situation rather than the individual,” this one not from the world of the somewhat old. In the summer between your high school and college years you did not change. Yoursituation did. You were no longer a high school student (wise and experienced as a graduating senior). Rather, you were about to be a lowly freshman again, though this time at a place whose rules and routines you had not yet learned. Anticipating these changes forced you to open yourself to new understandings of the world, to put your old ones away (or, at least, in mothballs) and get ready to change. Notice the direction of these forces. Changes in your situation make for changes in what you are like as an individual. It’s what we have been pushing in sociology forever, and it’s what is going to make retirement “so fun.” We get a fresh start on the whole deal. Redo!
How to Catch a Fish: The Weir Fishermen’s Control of the Sardine Herring, 1876–1903

Brian Payne

In 1876, Julius Wolff of New York’s Wolff & Ressing cannery firm arrived in Eastport, Maine to try his hand at producing a domestic sardine that could compete with the European imports. He successfully canned 600 cases of sardines, which quickly sold in the New York market for up to $12.00 a case. The following year Wolff & Ressing started the Eagle Preserved Fish Company in Eastport. Although Wolff tried to keep his new business venture a secret the profits were undeniable and new sardine factories quickly sprang up in Eastport, Lubec, and Robbinston. The sardine industry expanded so rapidly that by 1887, Hugh Smith of the US Fish Commission reported that “a large majority of the people, both along the American shore and on the British islands, are wholly dependent upon the sardine industry for a livelihood.”

By 1899 sixty-eight plants in Maine produced 1,170,568 cases of sardines valued at $3,352,076. Not only did the added competition among the canneries decrease the retail value of sardines, it also increased the cost of the principal raw material, the herring fish. The factories were in such fierce competition with one another in acquiring the

A typical sardine cannery like this one in Eastport, Maine were relatively large operations that employed a diverse labor force that included men, women, and children from the local Passamaquoddy bay region.
juvenile herring fish from the local weir fishermen, who wholly controlled the supply, that they were forced to pay the fishermen, according to Hugh Smith, “a very much larger figure for their fish than the business will warrant.” Throughout the period of 1875 to 1903 weir fishermen maintained high prices for their catch by selling it via an auction system that directly pitted competing canneries against one another. In an effort to stabilize the price of herring a number of plants formed an association in 1885. This association tried to establish a fixed price for the herring fish in order to break the weir men’s use of the auction system, but a small group of the more profitable weir fishermen responded by opening their own canneries and paying high prices for the juvenile herring fish. This forced the other canneries to, one by one, break from the association and return to purchasing the fish on the open market place. In 1899 the sardine factories were more successful in forming a combine. In that year two different syndicate factions formed, and two year later these two syndicates combined to become the Seacoast Canning Company, also known simply as “The Syndicate.”

The Syndicate controlled 75% of the canneries in Maine, but was only able to bring 25% of the weir men under contract. Because there were a few significant independent canneries still in operation there was still intense competition for juvenile herring. As such, weir fishermen refused to enter pre-arranged contracts, and continued the auctioning system that secured their control of the natural resources and its market value. It would seem that Smith’s observation that the population of Downeast Maine was “wholly dependent” upon the sardine industry is partially inaccurate. A more accurate statement would be that the sardine industry was wholly dependent on the weir fishermen who controlled access to the base material of production, juvenile herring, independent of canneries’ management, and could thus exercise a considerable degree of economic power.

Following Wolff’s initial success in 1876 he established the Eagle Preserved Fish Company. Between 1876 and 1879 nine factories were built in Eastport, Lubec, and Robinston. In 1882 there were twenty-eight sardine factories in Maine and by 1899 there were sixty-nine. During the spectacular growth of the industry between 1875 and 1903 the weir fishermen remained the very basis of this production capacity. Historian Richard Judd argues that the fishermen quickly and easily integrated the catching of herring for the sardine canneries into their “mix of occupations,” which allowed them to remain “independent from any single source of income.” Judd emphasizes the weir fishermen’s folk culture and economy that pitted them against the rise of capitalism in coastal Maine. “While the canneries operated within the larger capitalist system,” Judd writes, “the weir men enjoyed a rare independence based on their varied income options. Herring supplies for the canneries were accordingly uncertain for cultural, as well as natural reasons.”

Yet this celebration of the worker folk seems to dismiss the ability of the weir fishermen to successfully manipulate that capitalist market via their supreme control of the price of the raw material. The weir men’s use of the auction system clearly indicates that they were fully in tune with the theories of supply-and-demand and quite capable of successfully working within the competitive bull-versus-bear price market. Hugh Smith, of the US Fish Commission, even reported that Maine’s weirs were largely abandoned prior to the introduction of the sardine industry. Smith reported, “since the erection of sardine canneries a few of the fishermen have been induced to rebuild their weirs, and the herring proved to be fully as abundant now as formerly.” From
Smith’s observations, it appears that the capitalist sardine industry was the impetus for the reintroduction of the quintessentially folk weir fisheries, which suggests an important challenge to the oppositional nature of the two players in the sardine industry.

Weir fishermen most often auctioned off their catch to competing boatmen, who were contracted by the sardine canneries (see the sidebar in this article for a more thorough description and history of weirs). In 1888 the collecting boat fleet numbered 125 vessels and about 200 crewmen, most owned and worked by Canadians. It was during this auctioning system that the weir fishermen most demonstrated their ability to work within the capitalist market economy. Contemporary observer Hugh Smith wrote in 1888;

The boatmen act as agents for the canneries, with instructions to purchase the fish as cheaply as possible. When the boats from several canneries meet at a weir, the fishermen find it advantageous to put up their fish at auction and sell them to the highest bidder; and rivalry between the boatmen usually leads them to bid until they have reached the extreme limit named by the factory, and the one who can afford to pay the highest price takes the fish.

The elevation of market value for juvenile herring was also affected by the compensation due to the boatmen. Previously, boatmen were paid a set monthly salary, but in order to encourage the boatmen to be readily on the job when the weirs were full of fish, and thus get the fish to the factory in the freshest state possible, the factories added the compensation of fifty cents per hogshead of fish brought in, thus providing the boatmen with real market incentive to bring in more fish.

After just one decade of fantastic growth in this boom economy the sardine industry began facing its first real problem. By 1886 retail prices for a case of...
**Weirs** are essentially brush nets that use the tide to capture migrating schools of fish near the shore. Weirs were first developed by Native Americans long before the arrival of Europeans to North America, and were first mentioned in colonial literature in 1641. By the 1850s Maine weir fishermen were catching herring for the smoked-herring trade, the frozen fish trade, and to be used by offshore fishermen as bait for codfish, halibut, and other ground fish. Weirs were set in waters ranging from twenty-five to thirty fathoms deep, or in channels as deep as sixty fathoms, where the tide ranged from twenty to twenty-two feet. Stacks, typically made of birch wood, six to seven inches in diameter and eighteen to thirty-five feet long were driven into the mud about three feet apart. Spruce, cedar, and alder brush was then woven in and out of the stacks. By 1889 there were 273 weirs along the Maine coast, valued at $52,022; second only to lobster pods in number in Maine’s fisheries. Most were concentrated in eastern Maine; in 1893 there were 240 weirs in or near the Passamaquoddy Bay alone.

The weirs themselves became increasingly elaborate and many would not qualify as primitive apparatuses utilized by part-time folk fishermen. Hugh Smith noted that after 1880 the weirs were “considerably larger and more expensive than formerly.” Prior to 1880 weirs averaged an initial construction cost of $300 to $400, but following 1880, construction cost increased to an average of $600 with some costing $800 or even $3000. The labor-intensive construction of weirs normally took place in the spring, between April 1 and June 1, and certainly consumed a large percentage of the fisherman’s time during that period. Weirs required additional annual maintenance that could range between $40 and $1000, most averaging between $200 and $400, of additional investment. Weirs were such a considerable investment that the fishermen often named them as if they were boats or ships. According to the Bureau the Industrial and Labor Statistics the financial cost of a weir was such that “sometimes a number of men own a weir in common, and sometimes the proprietors of factories are part owners.” Other contemporary accounts make note of the increasing profitability of the weir fisheries on account of the sardine industry. Some weirs had such a positive reputation that they were rented out annually for up to $2,000 plus $3 for each hogshead of fish taken. Even at this high rental cost, the weir still made good for its lessees. Larger weirs could take up to five or six men to work while the smaller ones got by with two or three. Most weirs were worked by the multiples of people invested in the weir, while others hired out laborers for $25 to $30 a month plus board. It would appear that the folk work of weir fishing was easily and quickly incorporated into a capitalist market that placed financial value on material objects, production capacity, and, most importantly, the herring fish.
sardine cans had dropped to $4.00, less than half the price from 1880. Too many start-up competitors were entering the market, driving down the retail value of the product and driving up operational expenses such as wages, the cost of tin and solder, and the expense of herring. The solution to this economic problem, concluded many cannyery owners, was to add more rationality to the industry via a more integrated business system. In his 1887 report, Hugh Smith noted the first effort to combine into a kind of trust occurred in 1885 when factories sought to break the weir fishermen’s control of the price of herring. The effort was quickly defeated when “wealthy weir fishermen of Deer Island,” resisted the uniform fixed price set by the cannery trust by starting their own factory in Eastport to begin “independent operations.” This independent operation refused to obey the fixed price of herring and “caused the other factories to break their agreement and renew the competition.” The first effort to form a syndicate or trust was thus an effort to control the price of the herring fish and did not relate to the supply level or production capacity of those herring fishermen, who willingly sold to the syndicate when the factories recognized the fishermen’s stance as an independent producer within the industry.

In the early 1890s William O. Grady and Edward M. Lawrence of Eastport formed a partnership with New York financier John E. Searles in another effort to integrate the canneries. The effort failed when Julius Wolff, the largest cannery owner, refused to join. Julius Wolff then began buying up property in Lubec in 1898 and thus the “sardine war” between Eastport and Lubec began in full force. In 1899 investors from Chicago, led by S.G. Stevens, organized the Continental Sardine Company and began to buy up factories in Eastport. The investors dumped nearly $500,000 into Eastport offering owners high prices for their facilities, a share of the stock of Continental, and a job as factory manager in exchange for their cooperation with Continental, which was shortly renamed Seacoast Packing Company. Only two days after Seacoast took over a majority of the canning interests in Eastport Julius Wolff arrived in Lubec and began to consolidate the remaining factories into the Standard Sardine Company. Portland’s Board of Trade sided with local hero Julius Wolff in his battle with Chicago, and warned the people of Eastport that they “will be
very soon thereafter a good deal more agitated, when that great business has passed from local control, into the hands and management of a cold blooded trust, having little interest for the people and none for the town." Even though Wolff was from New York he assured the Board of Trade that “we will make our headquarters at Lubec.”

With powerful independent companies still in the market and new start-ups still appearing, however, it was not long before the newly consolidated Seacoast began to fail. The primary factor of their failure was their inability to decrease the wholesale price of the juvenile herring fish. Without full integration they could not break the auctioning system of the weir fishermen nor could they stabilize the retail price of sardines on the market, which was still heavily overstocked. After just two years Seacoast began selling off their best facilities to investors in New York. By 1903 most of the packers who originally sold to Seacoast had repurchased their factories, normally at lower prices than they had sold them for, and resumed operation under their own name.

With the syndicates’ failures the catching and selling of the base raw material, believed were artificially inflated due to the auctioning system.

What the sardine syndicate tried to do between 1899 and 1903 was vertical integration. What the famous, or infamous depending on your perspective, John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie did to bring order to the oil and steel industries, Grady, Searles, and Wolff hoped to do for the sardine industry. Yet the sardine syndicate failed because the weir fishermen wanted to preserve their place in the capitalist market as independent suppliers. Because enough of the canneries remained independent, the weir fishermen were able to keep up their auctioning methods and resist coming under contract with the syndicates. Considering the time, 1890s–1900s, it is impressive that the weir fishermen succeeded in breaking the integration effort. Weir fishermen did not try to check capitalism in favor of a folk cultural relationship with natural resources, but were trying to check industrial-monopolistic capitalism in favor of small business enterprise, which was nonetheless capitalism.

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I arrived in Guanajuato in early May at the end of the dry season. Everything was covered with a thin layer of dust. Vegetation had turned grey, and temperatures never went below 90 degrees. When I was leaving in late July, the rainy season was in full swing; torrential rains came in the afternoons washing down the streets and making the trees and the bushes green and lush again. Regardless of the season, for someone like myself who was born and raised in the urban jungle of Moscow, Guanajuato felt magical. It struck me as a place where time stood still, where people moved at a leisurely pace, and leaving your guidebook behind was the right thing to do. I practiced my Spanish, learned how to dance salsa, took classes in cooking, and made new friends, both Mexican and expatriate.

I have to admit that initially I didn’t pay too much attention to accounts of the sightings of rare and exotic Russians in the middle of Mexico: after all, when you travel, you want to learn something new, experience things that take you out of your routine. But as time went by, I couldn’t stop thinking about the strange Russian woman my hosts mentioned in conversations. What intrigued me about her was that she was not a transient visitor; she came to Guanajuato and stayed. How and why did that happen? And did she ever experience Russian тоска?

Although somewhat ambiguous in meaning, тоска [toska] permeates Russian worldview on many levels and is often connected to the feelings of displacement and loss.

Vladimir Nabokov best described it in his Commentary to Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin:

“No single word in English renders all the shades of тоска. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels, it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases, it may be the desire for somebody or something specific, nostalgia, lovesickness. At the lowest level, it grades into ennui, boredom.”

Being Russian myself, I am not inoculated against the occasional bouts of тоска, and towards the middle of my stay in Guanajuato, I realized that I might have been suffering from it also. The desire to establish a personal connection to a new country while renewing my links to my first language and culture led me serendipitously to a further exploration of Olga Costa’s life.

Born in 1913 to Jacob Kostakowsky and Ana Fabricant, émigrés from Odessa, then tsarist Russia, her journey exemplifies the complexity of connections between creativity and one’s first language and culture, a topic that has a deeply personal meaning to me as an immigrant. Issues of identity and creativity, of course, transcend the personal; they have a broader political appeal. For instance, recently Russia has been attempting to reclaim the cultural legacy of Russian artists displaced by twentieth century politics and war. Russians have long had a deeply rooted belief that although creativity is individual, it must be fed by the artist’s native

Mexico Through the Russian Gaze: Olga Costa in Guanajuato

Yulia Stakhnevich

In 2003, I went to the Mexican town of Guanajuato to work on my Spanish. What made this trip memorable though was not the learning of Spanish, but a serendipitous encounter with the legacy of Olga Costa, a Mexican artist of Russian descent.
milieu and that maintaining a strong connection to Russian culture and language is necessary for the expression of Russian creativity.

This view, no matter how naïve, is so prevalent in the Russian psyche that it has always played a role in how the Russian public viewed artists in self-imposed or government-sponsored exiles: with pity, sorrow, or disdain. Although some might question Olga’s Russianness by pointing out that she was born in Germany, soon after her birth the family moved from Leipzig to Berlin, which at that time became the cultural capital of the Russian expatriate community.

Olga’s father, a professional musician, actively participated in the Bavarian Socialist Revolution in 1919 and, after its defeat, was incarcerated but escaped the fate of hundreds who were executed. According to Lya Cardoza (Olga’s younger sister), as a reminder of his time in prison, he always carried a pocket watch on which he had scratched the names of his (then only daughter), Olga, and wife in Russian. The choice of the language is a powerful tribute to the significance that the Russian language had for Olga’s parents: it was the language of intimacy, of remembrance.

After the amnesty, the family reunited in Berlin where Russianness was in the air: it was in the food stores, bookstalls, coffee shops, and in the music halls where her father worked. But by 1925, the German economy was improving, making life more expensive for Russian émigrés. The result was devastating to the Russian community with many choosing to leave Berlin for Paris, New York, or elsewhere. For the Kostakowsky family that elsewhere was Mexico, the country that Lya Cardoza later described as “país revolucionario y lleno de nuevos horizontes” (“a revolutionary country full of new horizons”). The family began their transatlantic voyage in the French port of Saint-Nazaire where they boarded the vessel “Espagne,” arriving in the Mexican port of Veracruz on the seventh of September in 1925. They carried Nansen passports, which were issued by the League of Nations after World War I to stateless persons.

The transition to their new country was not smooth. Their luggage, consisting of books, musical notations, Jacob’s finished and unfinished compositions, and his cherished violin, all mysteriously disappeared at customs, leaving the family stranded in the port city with limited financial resources and no Spanish language skills.

In their first days in Mexico, the Kostakowsky family experienced different aspects of their new surroundings. The parents had to garner assistance from the German Consulate to ensure family subsistence and were engaged in frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful communications with customs officials about their lost or stolen luggage. They also fretted about train bandits and sent telegrams imploring relatives to wire money to help pay the family’s fare to Mexico City. Meanwhile, Olga and her sister marveled at the strange new vibrant colors of Mexico. In contrast to monochromatic Berlin, Veracruz instantly overwhelmed them with its array of tropical flowers, dark-skinned people, soft, lush breezes of the ocean carrying new scents, brightly robed vendedores selling strange and exotic fruits, and the rolling sounds of Spanish that they heard from street vendors and the maids at the hotel.

In his monograph on Olga Costa, Sergio Pitil quotes (in translation) Olga’s recollections of that first month in Veracruz.

“We arrived in Veracruz during the strike of tenant farmers. The city was covered with red and black flags. For me everything stood out: houses with wooden windows painted in green, the appearance of the people, the movement of air at dusk, the sky that sometimes became all black with vultures, the insects, the bread. The first time
that I entered the bathroom I discovered in the bathtub a huge black tarantula. Also I remember a maid at the hotel; she was tall and skinny and always wore a dress of yellow stiff muslin; in the mouth sparkled a gold tooth. With a cigarette in one hand and chamber pots from the rooms in the other, she walked in the hallway like a queen.”

Although the Kostakowskys’ impressions of Mexico were personal, it stands to reason that they were also influenced by the popular writings of Konstantin Balmont, a famous Russian symbolist poet who visited Mexico in 1905. He was one of the first Russian authors to visit Mexico and published his travel journal Путевые письма (Letters from the Road), several essays and poems, and translations of Mexican myths, all of which were widely popular among Russian armchair travelers.

With Olga’s parents being highly educated, it is likely that they read Balmont’s works and might have shared them with the children, pointing out the amazing things they all were about to encounter in the new land:

“The country of red flowers, discovered in a mind intoxicated by the Sun and enamored of the Moon, and the Evening Star, the Morning Star. A country of multi-colored flowers and of birds with bright feathers, azure, green, the shade of all precious stones. A country of bloody spectacles and of refined reverence, of legends truthful and of reality improbable, of colorful hieroglyphs and pyramid-shaped cathedrals, of slow words and the quick knife, of eternal Spring—eternal Autumn. A country whose history is a tale, whose fate is a sad poem, sadder than a poem by Edgar Allen Poe. A country deceptive, betrayed, sold-out, conquered by prophecy, by a genius, by a woman, by a horse, mutilated irretrievably by a pale-faced centaur, carrying destruction, devastation, and a hypocritical religion, along with deadly contagious diseases, everywhere he penetrates – to India, to Oceania, to the Peruvian idyll, and to this downtrodden Country of Red Flowers.”

In her later paintings Olga drew both from her initial impressions of Mexico and made artistic references to the imagery conjured up by Balmont: “the country of red flowers” lived on in many of her paintings, especially in landscapes and still lifes. In her interviews, she indicated that the impressions of seeing the unspoiled beauty of Mexico stayed with her throughout her life and influenced her work. For example, Olga’s most famous painting, *Vendedora de frutas* (Female Fruit Seller) from 1951 celebrates a traditional market scene, using bright colors and featuring a cornucopia of fruit. The depiction of the seller herself is reminiscent of the maid at the hotel that Olga admired in Veracruz. The artist recognizes the same strength of spirit and dignity beyond the subject’s humble station in life and paints her not as a subservient being, but as someone with queen like qualities.

Olga herself was not as bold. While her parents encouraged her to take courses in piano and voice to follow her father’s profession, she chose to pursue her natural predilection for painting: “Me daba miedo tocar o cantar en público. La pintura por el contrario es un trabajo solitario” (I was scared to play or sing in public. Painting, on the other hand, is a solitary profession.) And when Olga saw Diego Rivera’s murals for the first time, she was so transfixed by the colors that, as she put it, the music ceased to exist.

Olga entered the famous Academia de San Carlos. There her teacher was Carlos Mérida, a famous Guatemalan artist, who referred to her as “el ángel blanco de la pintura mexicana” (“white angel of Mexican painting”). A favorable comment on the surface, this definition stuck, identifying her as a Mexican by inclination, yet the “other” by birth. This duality, though subtle, separated her from native-born artists; however, Olga never discussed it in any of her interviews.

In the Academy, Olga took a lithography class, in which she met her future husband, José Chávez Morado. A promising student, she had to drop out because of financial difficulties. In 1935 she got married, a happy union that lasted 58 years. Her husband came from a well-to-do and respected Mexican family, and by the time of their marriage his career as an artist (particularly as a muralist) was flourishing. On the marriage license, Olga still used her maiden name, but soon afterwards she chose to Mexicanize it to a more conventional Spanish name, Costa. Surrounded by many artisans, Olga returned to painting. She referred to her first attempts as “pininos”, a word with no English equivalent, but which may be translated in this context as 'dabbling' in painting. This initially idle pastime became a professional career that lasted a lifetime. Olga preferred to stay away from the rough and tumble street politics, but her art reflected the on-going debate about the definition of *mexicanidad*, or what constituted an authentic Mexican identity. Many of her paintings are done in the *costumbrista* style that celebrates both the indigenous and mestizo elements in Mexican culture.

After living in Mexico City for many years, in 1955 Olga and José chose to move to the town of Guanajuato where they established a permanent residence. They purchased a house in the Pastita neighborhood with vistas of surrounding mountains. The house was a part of the seventeenth century Hacienda de Guadalupe, and the couple bought it with an idea to restore and to use it both as their home and studio space.

This became the place where Olga painted many of her later pieces. In her spare time, she established a lovely garden, and that’s where, in 1993 her husband had her ashes interred. The house became the *Museo-Casa Olga Costa-José Chávez Morado*, a museum that opened its doors after Olga’s death.

It contains the couple’s furniture, objects of art, mostly within Mexican indigenous and folk art traditions as well as works by both artists. The couple made significant contributions to several museums in Guanajuato and were well-known and respected in the city.

After returning from Guanajuato, I had not thought about Olga Costa for some time, until I had an opportunity to visit the Russian State Library in Moscow. The Library established a special collection about artists who worked abroad. The collection is known as Русское зарубежье [Russian foreign lands]. The foundation of such a collection was a major step in accepting the complex nature of creativity across national borders. Nonetheless, even the title of the collection indicates certain proprietary rights that the state-owned library claims to have on the individuals’ creative work if their contributions were to be included in the collection.

I was curious to find out if anything at all was known about Olga’s life and artistic legacy in her ancestral country. After several days of going through old-fashioned card catalogues and speaking with several librarians, it became clear that the existence of the whole Kostakovsky family with their artistic contributions remained unknown in Russia. Olga was not admitted into the pantheon of foreign artists whom Russia recognized as her own.

Conversely, in Guanajuato she was recognized as a respected Mexican painter and a patroness of Mexican art, a person born outside of Mexico, but who loved and cared for the people of her adoptive homeland. In Olga’s case, a key to her Mexicanness might have been a combination of her talent, genuine interest in her new country, and courage to claim her desired identity by establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with those whose cultural ties to Mexico were never disputed.

Matters of nationality and ethnicity are often painfully private, and we might never know if Olga was susceptible to the bouts of infamous Russian ‘toska’. What we do know is that although her Russian roots were buried, under close examination they can still be traced in her art. Does that make her Russian? Only Olga would have been able to answer this question. What we can say with certainty though is that she was successful at overcoming feelings of displacement and loss inherent in the experience of immigration by actively and genuinely engaging with her adoptive land. For those of us, including myself, who move beyond the borders of the familiar and have to constantly reinvent ourselves, Olga’s life will remain an inspiration, an example of achieving equilibrium, of finding a new home and yet remaining true to oneself.

Yulia Stakhnevic is an Associate Professor in the English Department.
Landscape and Wildlife Photographs

Frank Goga

Time, patience and luck... these are the photographer’s most important tools. Of course, the three are intimately related. Application of the first two allows one to be prepared when the third is good.

Time is required to travel to places where one wants to photograph and to concentrate on one’s surroundings once there. Patience and luck are required because all the elements of a great photograph are rarely present for more than a brief interval. Thus, in order to make a great photograph, one needs to be present and prepared when the karma is right.

Landscape photography is all about light. Landscape photographers cannot control the light on their subject; all we can do is try to be in the right place when the light is good. Thus, landscape photographers talk about the “golden hour” -- periods in early morning and late evening when the light comes from a low angle and is often soft and warm. A landscape photographer’s day often begins with a hike in the dark of early morning or ends with a hike back home in the dark of the evening, all in hopes of capturing a scene in good light. Sometimes, when nature does not cooperate, the hike is for naught. Other times one is rewarded with great light and a great photograph or two.

The photographer Robert Capa once said “If your photographs aren't good enough, you're not close enough.” While Capa was not talking specifically about wildlife photography, his idea is one of the keys to successful photographs of wild animals. Getting “close enough” to a living and usually wary wild animal requires a combination of the right equipment and skill. One needs an understanding of the behavior of the animal and the ability to effectively stalk the subject in order to get close enough so that one can “fill the frame” with an eye-to-eye view of the subject using a telephoto or macro lens.
Another key to strong wildlife photographs is action. While portraits of wild animals can be interesting, photographs of animals doing things are generally more interesting. If one spends time “in the wild” you realize that two activities occupy the large majority of many animals’ time: food and reproduction. Thus, many of my wildlife photographs depict eating or sex.

For the past several years, I have had the luxury of time to pursue landscape and wildlife photography more-or-less full time in the summer. In this time, my wife, Joan, and I have made trips to Alaska, the Northwest Territories (two weeks by canoe) and taken a six week road trip across the northern United States as far west as Montana. We have also spent extended intervals at our cabin in New Hampshire. Four of the ten photographs shown here were made on those trips. The remaining six photographs were made near our cabin. I hope that you enjoy looking at them as much as I enjoyed making them.

Frank Goga is a Professor in the Chemistry Department.
Above: Arctic Beach – Early Morning (NWT, Canada)
This photograph was made on the last morning of a thirteen day canoe trip in the Canadian arctic. The float plane would arrive to pick us up after breakfast. It had been windy and rainy for the previous twelve days. Luck and patience were definitely involved.

Right: Autumn Reflected
The abstract nature of reflections always grabs my attention. This photograph is an example of luck in making a photograph. There was a very short interval, as the wind began to blow, between the too perfect, mirror-like reflection of the completely calm lake and no reflection at all on the wind-stirred waves.
Left: *Lark Sparrow with Prey (Badlands NP)*
While hiking in Badlands National Park we saw a wide variety of birds. This lark sparrow alit for a brief interval on a nearby hillside and I made this photograph reflexively. It was not until I reviewed the images later that I noticed the grass hopper in its mouth. Lots of luck but no patience needed.

Below: *Meadowhawk Mating Wheel*
When one spends time in hauntung wet lands in summer you realize that mating dragonflies are quite common. Patience is required to find “windows” which allow for an unobstructed view in which to photograph them.
I was sitting on the ground near a bunch of black-eyed Susans at the edge of our yard. My goal was making photographs of the various pollinators (bees and flies) that were attracted to them. When this dragonfly alit on one of the flowers, I, with macro lens mounted on camera, was ready. A total of three frames, taken in rapid succession, were captured before she took off again.
The Art of Japanese Noh Theatre in Akira Kurosawa’s Throne of Blood

Minae Yamamoto Savas

Traditional Japanese theatre has a continuous performance tradition spanning several hundred years. Japanese Noh theatre has a particularly rich theatrical and aesthetic heritage that offers a doorway into Japanese history and culture. Japanese Noh plays unify and harmonize mime and dramatic elements with dance, chant, and an orchestra composed of a flute and three drums. The other critical elements involved in the performance of a Noh play are masks, robes, the mode of production, and the unique stage space in relation to the audience. These elements are intrinsically woven together into a harmonious whole creating a unified aesthetic experience. As Kompamu Kunio, an established contemporary performer of Noh, stated in The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives, “Noh is an event to be experienced directly and personally. It is not a panorama like opera or Kabuki, aimed at a large group of spectators in a one-way process.

Thus a person who goes to see Noh has certain responsibilities. A different drama is created for each member of the audience because Noh effects a direct exchange between the hearts of the performers and of each spectator…[A] given actor will perform in a given play with a given group of performers only once on any given day.

The subdued and symbolic movements of Noh depict impressive images of classical and medieval heroes and heroines. Noh plays draw on episodes from older texts, as well as folktales featuring historical or legendary figures. Many of the Noh plays written and revised in the medieval period are performed to this day while going through changes reflective of shifts in patronage, audiences, and social climate. The ideal of simplicity in the art of Noh and other art forms, such as flower arrangement, tea ceremony, landscape gardening, and monochromatic painting that flourished in the Muromachi period (1336-1573), is closely associated with the aesthetic concepts of ideal beauty. The study of Noh theatre and its significance as a living art today thus not only gives us an insight into the culture of medieval Japan, but also helps us focus on certain cultural continuities bridging traditional and contemporary Japanese societies.

Akira Kurosawa’s Adaptation of Macbeth in his Postwar Japanese Film

The influence of Noh on the films of Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998) is particularly evident in Kumonosu-jo (“Castle of the Spider’s Web,” also known as Throne of Blood, 1957). Basing his work on Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Kurosawa set this film in the middle ages (1185–1600) of Japan, a period when samurai warriors first rose up to challenge the authority of the established court. While the early medieval period marks the firmly established governance by the shoguns, hereditary commanders of a military force, the late middle ages saw more frequent incidents of the overthrow of a superior by his own retainers. This significant historical and social phenomenon of the late medieval Japan coincides with the phenomenon presented in the world of Macbeth. By transplanting Macbeth to medieval Japan and incorporating Noh elements in Throne of Blood, Kurosawa has further pursued the theme of Macbeth. In Throne of Blood, Kurosawa allows his audience to scrutinize human desire for power, cruelty, and weakness.
that yields to temptation. The *Throne of Blood* begins with the following song.

- Look upon the ruin
- Of the castle of delusion
- Haunted only now
- Of those who perished
- A scene of carnage
- Born of consuming desire
- Never changing
- Now and throughout eternity

This introductory chant gives a vivid description of the emptiness of General Washizu’s (*Macbeth*) ambition and of human desire for power. After defeating rebel armies, Generals Washizu and Miki (*Banquo*) are lost in the dense Cobweb Forest on their way to the fortress of Lord Tsuzuki (*King Duncan*). In the forest they meet a ghostly prophet. As she predicts, Washizu and Miki are both immediately promoted by Lord Tsuzuki. The prophecy further deludes Washizu into believing that he will ascend to the throne. Encouraged and manipulated by his ambitious wife, he plots the murder of his lord, which eventually brings him and his wife to ruin.

In *Throne of Blood* Kurosawa emphasizes the narcissism of *Macbeth*, underlining the struggle of the individual for ego. This struggle is artistically manifested in the Noh-style interaction between Washizu (*Macbeth*) and his wife Asaji (*Lady Macbeth*), not through the soliloquy as in *Macbeth*. While Washizu and Asaji work together to achieve their mutual goals driven by their own desire for power, they struggle with their own internal contradictions. Washizu is torn between two irreconcilable feelings: his loyalty toward Lord Tsuzuki (*King Duncan*) as well as his friend Miki (*Banquo*) and his ambition of becoming the absolute authoritative figure. Asaji criticizes such ambivalence that Washizu reveals, enticing him into proving himself to be the man. She says, “Ambition makes the man.” Much of Asaji’s apparent merclessness is, however, merely protective camouflage to conceal her own innermost fragility. Not able to cope with her own internal conflicts at the end, she is the one who loses her mental equilibrium, not Washizu.

Such struggle of the individual featured in this postwar film is in some way indicative of Japan’s constant struggle between preserving Japanese cultural tradition and yielding to the forces of modernization to enjoy the fruits of progress. The struggle within Japan is manifested in the film, crafted by the hand of the director. Kurosawa was born at the tail end of the Meiji period (1868-1912), the dramatic era of modernization and westernization. He lived through the twentieth century, experiencing the war years of intense nationalism and Japan’s postwar period of rapid economic growth. The battle between old and new has been conspicuous in the films of Kurosawa, who was educated in both Japanese tradition and western knowledge.

In Japanese cultural tradition the importance of joint responsibilities linking members of the group is highly valued while in western culture a special emphasis is placed on individuality. In *Throne of Blood*, the complex interplay of eastern and western cultures is embodied, and Noh performance is effectively incorporated to reflect the historical era in which the film is set. Kurosawa also used ritualized elements of Noh to highlight the tension and intensity Asaji (*Lady Macbeth*) conveys. For example, her fixed expression reminds the audience of a Noh mask with its suggestion of restrained or suppressed emotions hidden behind the mask. Her highly stylized movements often conceal the deliberate nature of her actions. Chants resounded through *Throne of Blood* are modeled on the traditions of Noh songs. There are many allusions to well-known Noh plays, creating a cinematic world of multiple dimensions. Kurosawa maneuvered such highly evocative substances of Noh to awaken the imagination of the audience, which is the essence of Japanese Noh theatre of medieval origin.

**The Influence of Noh on the *Throne of Blood***

In his 1984 book entitled *The Films of Akira*, well-known American Japan film critic Donald Richie delineates Kurosawa’s indebtedness to Japanese
Noh drama, quoting Kurosawa’s words: “I like [Noh] because it is the real heart, the core of all Japanese drama. Its degree of compression is extreme, and it is full of symbols, full of subtlety. It is as though the actors and the audience are engaged in a kind of contest and as though this contest involves the entire Japanese cultural heritage… I wanted to use the way that Noh actors have of moving their bodies, the way they have of walking, and the general composition which the Noh stage provides.” Richie argues that another reason for using Noh in this film is that Kurosawa was interested in the limitations of character; that is, “the Noh offered the clearest visual indication of these limitations.” There are certain “limitations” that one can express using stylized movements and masks of Noh, as Richie points out. However, these visibly imposed “limitations” are indeed effective at expressing restrained or suppressed emotions on the Noh stage.

Richie indicates the Noh elements are mostly associated with Asaji for “she is the most limited, the most confined, the most driven, the most evil.” Similarly, Keiko McDonald, in her 1994 book entitled *Japanese Classical Theatre in Films*, claims that in some scenes, while Washizu’s features work in expressions of horror and dismay, his wife Asaji’s face is a study in absolute control: static, cold, and impassive, like a female blank Noh mask.

Asaji’s face resembles *fukai* or *shakumi* masks designating a middle-aged woman. Some scholars claim that the female Noh mask is virtually expressionless because it represents what may be called “neutral expression” or “intermediate expression.” However, the “expressionlessness” of Noh masks is deliberate. Using the expressionless Noh mask is one of the most effective ways to express what is beyond expression. In this scene her Noh mask-like expression effectively reveals the hidden power of the dark side of human nature, bringing out intense moments. It is true that Asaji conceals her feelings more thoroughly than her husband does. As a result, she is more overwhelmed with the intensity of internal conflict than Washizu.

In madwoman Noh plays, this would be the most dramatic moment in which a protagonist displays her madness, hidden under the expressionless masks. A madwoman in Noh plays often forgets herself because of some kind of traumatic event that triggers the mental disequilibrium. The majority of these types of plays feature a mother’s affection for her child and her suffering when parted from that child. The madness is expressed in a subtle yet intense manner. Such restrained madness often
effectively conveys agony, suffering, and despair of the female protagonist. With a strong indication of derangement, her dramatic expression resembles that of a demonic woman wearing hanya or ja masks. Her expression of madness reveals profound sadness, rooted in the vanity of all desires of the will. Kurosawa’s adoption of Noh is not limited to the performance of Asaji and Washizu. The film also contains a significant allusion to the well-known Noh Play Kurozuka, or Black Mound. The Noh play begins when two itinerant monks seek lodging for the night in the house of a poor woman at Kurozuka in Adachigahara. To entertain the guests, the mistress of the house spins a hem thread on a spinning wheel while reciting a lament for her empty and bitter life. For the Japanese audience, the early scene from the film in which Washizu encounters an obscure woman spinning thread on a wheel deep in a forest thus signifies the cycle of sufferings of all beings.

In the Noh play Black Mound, the mistress warns the monks not to look into her bedroom when leaving them to collect firewood to keep them warm, but one of the monks is unable to restrain his curiosity. Peeping into her room, there he finds a pile of skeletons. Realizing that they are in the house of a demon, they flee hurriedly. Appearing as an angry demon, the mistress chases them down until she finally is overcome by the power of the monks’ prayers. This scene from the Noh plays reminds us of the scene from the film in which Washizu and Miki (Banquo) pass mounds of unburied human skeletons. This scene effectively presents multiple dimensions of the film. For those who are familiar with the Noh play Black Mound, it indicates human weakness and falling into temptation. What is ironic about this play is that the ascetic monks who are practicing severe service of self-discipline and abstinence cannot simply resist their curiosity. Their lack of self-discipline ignites the anger of the demonic woman who attempted to offer some help by providing them with shelter and warmth.

For those who see the horrifying scene as is, it signifies the futility of human egos, which in some cases drive people to kill each other. Throughout the film we do not see any brutal murder scenes. Instead of relying on what is visible in the film, Kurosawa makes the best use of what is invisible by allowing the imagination of the audience its full play, which is the fundamental principle of Japanese Noh theatre. Based on the same principle, to conquer our fear, we must look at everything straight on. According to Kurosawa in his 1982 book Something Like an Autobiography, Kurosawa’s brother said to him, when he took Kurosawa to the ruins of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, “If you shut your eyes to a frightening sight, you end up being frightened. If you look at everything straight on, there is nothing to be afraid of.” We have to look at the pile of the skeletons straight on. This is a reality from which we cannot escape. This brief shot is more visually powerful than any of the actual brutal murdering scenes ever filmed.

Finally, the structure of Noh has also greatly influenced Kurosawa’s filmmaking. Kurosawa adopted one of the most important aesthetic concepts in Noh, the three organizational steps based on the ancient Chinese court music: jo (beginning and preparation), ha (break
and rupture), and kyū (rapid or urgent). In relation to the full dramatic action of *Throne of Blood*, the introductory chant in the film, as mentioned above, constitutes the first *jo* section, where a slow and dignified tempo is used for the opening part. The rapid *ha* phase effectively builds and vacillates. This section designates a shift to a faster tempo, which accentuates Washizu’s torment due to his own troop’s betrayal as well as the death of his wife. The final *kyū* scene reaches a state of controlled frenzy, in which an even more rapid tempo is adopted to conclude the story. In this final scene, Washizu’s own archers turn on him and fill his body with a barrage of arrows, including one straight through his neck. The final *kyū* thus builds to climax.

In *Throne of Blood*, Kurosawa exploits various theatrical elements of Noh such as its structural organization, masks, music, chant, and choreography to reproduce the total theatre experience of Noh in his film. The highly stylized Noh movements and expressions of human desire to linger in the audience’s mind. Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* embodies the intricate interplay of eastern and western cultures.

*Minae Savas is an Assistant Professor in the Foreign Languages Department.*
Disenfractioned: *How a Blind Spot for Fractions May Be a Hindrance to Democracy*

Matt Salomone

If Old MacDonald has seven cows and three horses on his farm, which is greater, his cows, or his animals?

“He has more cows,” the casual reader would be forgiven for saying. A familiar mathematics problem, he or she would think, inviting a quick computation and immediate answer, and perhaps best expressed with arcane symbols such as “7 > 3” as though to encode a truth so pure it surpasses written language.

But the casual reader would be invited to re-read the question carefully. MacDonald has seven cows, but ten animals in total. Ten being greater than seven, he has more animals than he has cows. “A trick question,” decides the reader, a phrase that invariably means “a question whose precise wording and immediate solution I haven’t yet been shown.”

If a trick lies in this question, it may be more in the mind of the reader than in the words of the examiner. As part of his 1960’s study of how children’s logical minds develop, the education theorist Jean Piaget posed this cows-and-animals question to schoolchildren, with the predictable result that majorities of students up to the age of 10 make the inappropriate comparison of cows to horses. He writes that the students’ failure to attend to detail in this question is due to their developing “part-whole reasoning.” At this stage, he suggests, students have been trained in the habit of comparing sets that do not overlap (the cows with the horses), and not sets that do (the cows with the animals).

For these children, it is not long before math educators typically introduce them to the object whose purpose is to solve all their part-whole reasoning problems: the fraction. This is also the earliest stage to which many adults, even highly educated ones, trace the roots of their persistent disengagement and anxiety with numbers. This disengagement may have far-reaching implications for how these adults conduct their personal, professional, and public lives.

Keeping it Real

Critical thinking about numbers is increasingly vital to both productivity and public discourse. Anthony Carnevale, then Vice President at Educational Testing Service, wrote in 2003 that higher-order cognitive skills such as mathematical reasoning are the gatekeepers of economic opportunity, “especially in the United States, where poorly educated individuals, not employers or governments, pay the price of educational inequality.” Citing the National Adult Literacy Survey, he contends that 40 percent of the U.S. labor force possesses minimal or basic quantitative skills, placing them in the most sluggish and lowest-salaried segments of the economy. Meanwhile, he writes, “those who get the best jobs have taken the most mathematics.”
However, Carnevale’s analysis also suggested that the key to upward mobility is not necessarily advanced mathematics, but advanced reasoning. The mathematical skill required of those workers in the most highly-paid jobs “does not, on average, rise much above independent application of basic mathematical operations in complex situations.” What our workforce seems to need, and reward, most is the ability to join relatively simple math with sophisticated reasoning; to interrogate our world with numbers, and to interrogate the numbers in our world.

Yet bad experiences with simple math derail many learners developing this ability. Fractions are the first and most fundamental instance of what author Sheila Tobias calls “dropped stitches” in a person’s developing number sense — the implication being that, once dropped, none of the stitches that follow will line up, no matter how expertly they are sewn. The resulting cognitive deficit, if not patched, may pose a serious obstacle to critical thinking about numerical quantities.

So what gain is it for an adult to know fractions? For that matter, what does it even mean to “know” fractions?

For those that have dropped the stitch, fractions can seem a hopeless morass of techniques and terminology: “cross multiplication,” “common denominators,” “reciprocals.” This is no surprise: traditional mathematics instruction at this level tends to be skill-focused. As math educator Barbara J. Rose puts it, “The standardized curriculum expects students to do mathematics, not to think about its nature or raise questions about its existence.” Yet “doing” fractions without understanding them only develops abstract skills with little relevance or power to interrogate the world.

To re-empower our number skills, Rose’s and Carnevale’s perspectives together point to a need for more circumspection and application in mathematics. Rather than treating fractions as a necessary annoyance of arithmetic on our way to algebra, geometry, and calculus, they might say, slow down and explore how fractions and fractional reasoning help us make sense of real-world problems. Rather than reaching up toward higher levels of abstraction, reach out toward more diverse contexts of application. Contemplate before you calculate.

Viewed through this lens, our understanding of a mathematical concept (fractions) derives from our understanding of our world. Thus can mathematical fluency be acquired — not taught — much in the same way as language and literacy develops: within a context. The skills acquired in this mode are then more easily accessed in new contexts later in an education, later in a career, and later in life. This skill set is known variously as “numency” or “quantitative literacy,” which unlike “mathematics” is necessarily acquired in a broad spectrum of contexts. Educationally, this means numeracy is not only a goal for a mathematics course, but for coursework across the curriculum.

As an example of how understanding of fractions is acquired through context, let us take a moment to contemplate one of their most confounding aspects: the denominator.

### Uncommon Denominators

That “most” quantities are represented by a single whole number can make understanding a fraction — represented by a pair — challenging. In the language of part-whole comparisons, the “top” number of the pair is a proper fraction (the numerator) represents the size of the part while the bottom number (the denominator) represents the size of the whole. Because these two numbers serve opposing roles in the comparison, however, they effect opposite changes on the value of the fraction, interfering with our inherent desire to estimate its size.

The part-whole comparison of cows to animals in the Old MacDonald problem can be encapsulated in the fraction 7/10. If one of his horses is replaced by a cow, the numerator of this fraction increases, and the new fraction 8/10 is larger than the old. We might say that cows make up a larger proportion of the farm animals than they did before. In this sense, the numerator of a fraction has a “straightforward” effect on its size: when the numerator increases, so does the fraction.

If, on the other hand, we were instead to add one more horse to the farm, then the proportion of cows to animals then goes from 7/10 to 7/11. The addition of an extra animal to the denominator, but not the numerator (since our new animal is not a cow), results in a smaller fraction since the cows are now making up a smaller proportion of the farm animals. So the denominator of a fraction has a “backward” effect on its size: when the denominator increases, the fraction decreases.

This tension between the opposing effects of changes in numerators and denominators is crucial to the understanding of fractions’ meaning. Indeed, its implications in mathematics are far-reaching. It is no stretch to say that many of the concepts and computations central to calculus — such as the measurement of rates of change on an ever-shrinking scale — rely upon striking a balance between these two opposing forces of arithmetic.

Resolving this cognitive dissonance is not a matter of learning rules or processes, but merely of understanding the nature of part-whole comparisons. Yet, as Barbara Rose noted, students at age 10 are typically not given the opportunity to be cognitively dissonant...
in mathematics (let alone in their other subjects), and this teachable moment slips away. Students respond by discarding the dissonance instead of confronting it and integrating it into a more sophisticated understanding.

In short, they develop a habit of being attentive only to numerators of fractions and not denominators.

Cornell University psychologist Valerie Reyna contends that neglect of denominators can be a matter of life or death. A consultant to the National Cancer Institute, Reyna makes the case that “low numeracy translates to poorer medical treatment and poorer health outcomes,” since both patients and health professionals rely upon statistics and risk analyses to make informed treatment decisions. “In some experimental situations,” she writes, “people prefer 10-in-13 odds over 9-in-11 odds, even though the latter are more favorable,” because fraction confusion makes the larger numerator more enticing even though the still-larger denominator more than washes out its effect. Reyna promotes better education, or at minimum better writing, about health statistics and risks to help doctors and patients make more informed decisions.

Neglect of denominators is a persistent issue in other public spheres as well. Broadly speaking, every percentage statistic — a percentage being merely a fraction whose denominator (“whole”) is one hundred — invites the critique: “Percentage of what?”

In 2009, Massachusetts legislators voted to raise the state sales tax rate from 5% to 6.25%. In April of that year, a Boston Globe article reported this to be a “1.25 percent sales tax increase.” Later, in July, another Globe article termed it a “25 percent hike in the state sales tax.” Aside from the difference in rhetorical force in which 1.25 is an “increase” while 25 is a “hike”, this reporting highlights two different answers to the percentage-of-what question. In April the change in sales tax was reported as a percentage of the tax base (1.25 out of 100), and in July as a percentage of the tax rate (1.25 out of 5). This subtle difference in denominators has a dramatic effect on the size of the fractions used to characterize the same phenomenon.

In fact, stealth denominators are a perennial source of fiscal misinformation, particularly surrounding issues of economic justice. At the time of this writing, claims such as “the top 1% in America control 42% of our financial wealth” and “a 9% federal sales tax will help create a fair tax code” are animating politicians and demonstrators on both sides of the political spectrum. Each, however, is critically missing a denominator: Top 1 percent of whom? (“People?”) Tax 9 percent of what? (“Sales?”) It is impossible to assess such claims without their denominators. A cynic might suggest that, despite their pretense of precision, these political statements are not to be taken literally, but emotionally.

On that point, Valerie Reyna would likely agree. Her “fuzzy-trace theory” contends that people by default prefer quick, vague, instinctual judgments to more precise analyses requiring attention to detail. When assessing which of two fractions is larger, for instance, we are inordinately swayed by a gut instinct to prefer larger numbers. So we might erroneously conclude 10/13 is larger than 9/11, because at a glance it “looks bigger,” and not pause even for a brief computation that shows our instinct to be mistaken.
Finding Perspective Through Fractions

So how do we keep our gut instincts in check long enough to develop our sense of fractions? If the goal is to develop a better sense of fractions’ magnitudes and their meaning within the contexts of our world (numeracy), arithmetic drills are likely to be insufficient. Child psychologist Steven Hecht, in a 2003 study, found that conceptual understanding, more than arithmetic skill, determines whether a learner will succeed in computing, estimating, and using fractions in context. In other words, we may find fractions difficult more because we lack understanding of what they are, not merely what they do. Improving this understanding calls for more mindfulness, not merely more practice.

In the spirit of numerate citizenship, then, let us advance a more mindful definition of fractions that makes it easy to locate and understand fractions within their many contexts: A fraction is a relationship between two numbers which is unchanged when those numbers are scaled upward or downward equally. This definition has the advantage of highlighting what is important about fractions (the relationship between the part and the whole) over what is not (the scale, or absolute sizes, of the part and whole). In the commonly-abused mental picture, a fraction does not describe the size of a slice of pizza, nor the size of the whole pizza itself, but rather the connection between the sizes of slice and whole, which for a given fraction is the same whether the pizza is a personal size or whether it is large enough to feed an army. The scale can then be adjusted to fit the circumstance, leaving the fraction itself unchanged.

In this definition we can locate fractions as tax rates: 6.25 cents out of every 100 scales up to $625 on a $10,000 car purchase. We can locate fractions as cancer treatment odds: 10 out of 13 patients responding positively to a treatment scales up to roughly 77 out of 100. Fractions are dosages: prescribing 5 milligrams of a drug per 1 kilogram of a patient’s weight scales up to 250 milligrams taken by a patient weighing 50 kilograms. Fractions are concentrations: carbon dioxide present at 389 parts per million in the atmosphere scales to an eight-foot cube of the greenhouse gas within an air space roughly the size of a football stadium.

This conceptual understanding, and intuitive estimation, of fractions provides perspective to balance our gut instincts. At an objective level, 6.25 sounds like a small tax, and 389 sounds like a large amount of carbon dioxide. With their denominators in place, however, these numbers may tell a different story. After all, any comparison of a part to a whole is in essence an establishment of perspective: how big is the part really, when compared to the whole?

In 1991, Valerie Reyna re-examined Piaget’s Old MacDonald problem. Her analysis showed that the confusion over part and whole, cows and animals, was indeed related to a conceptual disconnect, an inability to access and implement logical knowledge. She also showed that this disconnect was present independently of misleading wording in the question. So no, the Old MacDonald question is not a trick — it’s just the simplest of examples illustrating that our numerate minds are not always in the habit of comparing parts with wholes. Is it any surprise, then, that the fractions that embody those comparisons remain frustratingly opaque for so many otherwise-capable adults?

For many who struggle with fractions, a pause to consider fractions’ meaning within a context that matters to them may be enough to pick up their “dropped stitch,” alleviate some of their long-standing math anxiety, and permit them to more fully engage with the numbers in their world. It need not be the end of the conversation, particularly for scientists, engineers, and mathematicians who will require a much deeper understanding of how to operate using fractions, but it can be a common ground on which we all can begin. Our data-drenched democracy would be better for it.

Matthew Salomone is an Assistant Professor in the Mathematics and Computer Science Department.

Matthew Salomone
Older Immigrants in the United States: The New Old Face of Immigration

Jing Tan

Between 1820 and 2007, the United States has admitted more than 73 million immigrants, including refugees and asylum seekers. To say we are a nation of immigrants is no cliché. Since the 1930s, the influx of immigrants in the United States has steadily increased reaching its highest point in the 1990s. The Current Population Survey (CPS) estimates that the non-institutionalized population in the United States includes 33.5 million foreign born, representing 11.7% of the U.S. population. Latin America contributes the highest number with 53.3%, 25% from Asia, 13.7% from Europe, and the remaining 8% from other regions of the world. Whereas immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were mostly from European countries, the past five decades have seen rising numbers of immigrants from the Americas and Asia. This is due to the impact of the 1965 Immigration Act, which abolished the national origins quota system. Before the passage of this legislation, there were annual quotas based on nationality which applied to all countries except those in the Western hemisphere.

Immigrants to the United States have historically been younger than the native population but that trend has also been changing. Now, older adults make up America’s fastest-growing immigrant group. Since 1990 the number of foreign-born people over 65 living in the United States has grown from 2.7 million to 4.3 million, and the number is expected to increase to 16 million by 2050. The percentage of adults aged 65 years and older within the immigrant pool rose from 4.4% in 2005 to 5.6% in 2007; furthermore, those 60 years and older rose from 7.6% in 2002 to 8.6% in 2007. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), over 60% of older immigrant adults live primarily in six states: California, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois.

Data from the New Immigrant Survey shows that 85% of older immigrants indicate their intention to live in the United States for the rest of their lives. Various geriatric service providers need to be aware of the fact that the population of older immigrants is in need and unlikely to return to their native countries.

Why Do They Come?

Literature on older immigrants classifies the older foreign-born population into two categories, based on their migration pathways. The “invited elderly” refers to late-life immigrants invited to reunite with their adult children and/or family members, while the “immigrated elderly” refers to those who immigrated in their 30s and 40s and have grown older in the U.S. The family-based system of immigration was precipitated by the 1952 Immigration Act with the entrenchment of the “immediate relatives” category that was not subject to quotas. Naturalized adult children over the age of 21 or siblings can petition for relatives in their native countries under “immediate relatives” category of the family-based preference system. Amendments in 1965 further changed the national origin quota formulae and increased the preference categories under which immigration could take place. These changes have contributed to the increase in the volumes of “invited elderly,” particularly from non-European countries. The vast majority of the 60 and older age group arrive in the United States under the category of “immediate relatives” of U.S. citizens.

There are not only differences among older immigrants from different regions or countries, but also within the same ethnic group. For example, although all are called ethnic Chinese older adults, those from the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore may have different values and ideologies, different educational and economic backgrounds, different levels of acculturation and English proficiency, and require different services once they are here in the United States. The intergroup and intragroup diversities in immigrant history and demographic, cultural norms and family value systems, health beliefs, religion and spirituality, and attitudes toward health and social services present challenges to social work and other health care professions to work with this population.

Stressors are endemic in the immigration and resettlement process. The inherently stressful nature of immigration and the concomitant stressors associated with living as an immigrant are well established in literature. Older adults are especially susceptible to these stressors and the ensuing mental health problems. When compared to immigrated elderly, the invited elderly are
more likely to be new immigrants in their 60s and 70s, experiencing severe psychological, physical, and financial difficulties. Many of the invited elderly are aging parents of naturalized American citizens, and they are among the most isolated people in the United States. These older immigrants are a vulnerable population. Most of them speak little or no English and do not drive. As a result of language barriers, a lack of social connections and values that sometimes conflict with the dominant American culture, research has found a high prevalence of depression among recent elderly immigrants.

Immigrant families from developing countries have often been characterized by a strong family tradition of parental authority, mutual support, strong family ties, and filial piety. In most immigrant populations, families have played the most important role in caring for their elderly members. Intending to reunite with their children, the invited elderly come to the United States with their cultural expectations. American society isn’t organized in a way that meets their expectations, and life in America can be hard to navigate. After moving to the United States, most recent older immigrants, especially those from non-English-speaking countries, become dependent on their children and grandchildren for help with daily transportation are the most significant barriers to quality of life for older immigrants in the United States. Both Mr. and Mrs. Jiang can speak some simple English, but they could not understand medical terms and have difficulty reading newspapers and watching American TV. Mr. Jiang wanted to install satellite TV in their apartment in order to get Chinese television programs and made his request to the apartment manager, but he was unsure if the manager’s response meant that he could install the satellite dish or not and it went uninstalled.

The inability to drive is also a bigger impediment than it was in China. The public library within walking distance to their home does not carry Chinese-language books or DVDs. The apartment has transportation services for shopping every week, however, its services do not go to the Chinese grocery stores that older Chinese immigrants prefer to shop at. They depend on their daughter to drive them to the Chinese grocery stores and a bigger library that has a good collection of Chinese-language books and DVDs. Mrs. Jiang needs to go to the social security office for an interview that is part of the application process for Medicaid, but the office is only open on weekdays and there is no bus available. She says, “My daughter has to work, so it is a trouble for her. However she will find time to go in the end. I will not bother my manager if I can solve the problem.” Both Mr. and Mrs. Jiang feel that their children have their own lives. They do not ask for help from their children as long as they can handle a situation themselves. At the same time, they also believe that their children are their safety net.

Mr. and Mrs. Jiang admitted that they have fewer friends and are less active socially in the U.S., but, in the end, they report that “there is nothing in our lives to complain about.” They are both actively taking English classes to prepare their citizenship exam. They never think of returning China and believe the United States is their home and look forward to holidays in order to have a family reunion with all their children and grandchildren.

Mr. and Mrs. Jiang

Mr. and Mrs. Jiang had a life that everyone in China wished to have. Both of them were successful chemical engineers who had retired to a comfortable life in a city in the south of China. Moreover, Mr. and Mrs. Jiang have three successful children, a son and two daughters. All three children came to the United States for graduate study in the 1980s and stayed. Their son is currently a tenured professor and associate dean of business at a university in California. One daughter works at the University of Wisconsin and the other works for a company in St. Louis, Missouri. All three children became naturalized citizens of the United States and sponsored green cards for their parents. At the ages of 71 and 73 respectively, Mr. and Mrs. Jiang immigrated to the United States with legal permanent residency status.

Mr. and Mrs. Jiang first stayed with their son’s family in California and wished to apply for public housing there, but the waiting list for public housing in California was too long. After living with their son for a month, they moved to Wisconsin to live with their oldest daughter for a while, finally, moving to St. Louis where their younger daughter was living. They have lived in a government sponsored senior apartment in St. Louis for more than 3 years.

After a few months at the senior apartment in St. Louis, Mr. Jiang experienced some health problems but did not have any health insurance that would allow him to seek treatment. Although Mr. and Mrs. Jiang have green cards they do not qualify for most government aid including Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security until they obtain citizenship. Fortunately, the social worker in their apartment complex helped him to find a local hospital that provided free medical services. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer and received free treatment and medicine. Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Jiang are counting the days until they can apply for citizenship. They are about two months shy of the 5 years of residency they need before they can apply.

Mrs. Jiang said that “everything is good in the U.S. However, there are two important things: English and car.” Language and
living tasks, such as going places and making doctor’s appointments. Caring for immigrant elders presents various challenges to their children who have their own adjustment problems and other issues, such as unemployment, family conflicts, crowded housing, and pressure to succeed in the new homeland.

Health Service Use among Older Immigrants

Despite greater needs, older immigrants, especially among those recently arrived from non-English-speaking and less developed countries, underutilize various health and social services. There has been little research on health care utilization of immigrants. However, research has reported that older immigrants are less likely to have a regular source of care and underuse preventive services, inpatient care, primary health care, nursing home, home and community long-term care, hospice care, and mental health services.

Many researchers have tried to explain the reasons of underutilization and identify the barriers against health service use among older immigrants. The characteristics associated with low usage of health services among older immigrants include personal characteristics and structural characteristics. Older immigrants who have language difficulties, negative attitudes and cultural beliefs toward western services, and prefer informal helping resources are less likely to utilize health services. There are also structural characteristics that relate to underutilization among older immigrants, such as the accessibility and cost of formal services, health insurance eligibility, and cultural appropriateness of service delivery.

As a vulnerable population, older immigrants face numerous challenges and barriers. Researchers summarize three major types of potential barriers to service utilization that older immigrants face: (1) institutional or structural barriers, such as unavailability of services, eligibility restrictions related to noncitizen immigrant status, cost of service, and racism; (2) instrumental or functional barriers, such as the lack of transportation and service information, and (3) cultural and linguistic barriers, such as conflicting health beliefs, a lack of English skills, and, on the part of the health service provider, insensitivity to cultural norms of interactive behavior.

The most fundamental barrier is the lack of knowledge about available services. Available but unknown services become meaningless to the intended population. Research on the lack of knowledge and understanding of health and social services suggest an urgent need for effective dissemination of information about available services to older immigrants. As for service providers, it is important to become knowledgeable about legal and other eligibility requirements of service and programs that are applicable to different immigrant groups. Regardless of the type of services and agency offering them, increasing service utilizations among older immigrants requires that services are available, accessible, and acceptable to them. Furthermore, service providers need to be aware of the special vulnerability of newly arrived older immigrants with less than 5 years of residence in the U.S. due to their ineligibility for public assistance and social services in most states, including SSI and Medicaid.

Even when immigrant elders are eligible for and aware of services, those with limited English skills or lack of transportation still cannot access the services they need. Concrete services, such as transportation, and resources for learning English, are needed to help older immigrants access health and social service systems. Service providers need to actively reach out to the intended ethnic immigrant elderly population and provide information about available services in culturally and linguistically sensitive ways.

For an effective approach to service delivery for the immigrant elderly population, services also need to be culturally responsive or acceptable. For example, social activity centers and residential facilities that serve typical American-style meals will not draw older immigrants who have strong preferences for their ethnic foods. Similarly, health and social service providers’ lack of knowledge about cultural norms of interpersonal behavior and patterns of relationship formation that are different from the American norms can result in dissatisfaction with the services and consequent underutilization of services by older immigrants. Cultural differences can create misunderstandings and tension between service providers and their elderly clients. Due to the vast diversity, it becomes important to understand the intergroup and intra-group difference among immigrant elderly population in their religious and spiritual beliefs, in their attitudes toward health and social services, in the appropriateness of involving family caregivers in service planning, in cultural norms for effective interpersonal behavior, and in other cultural preferences, such as food and type of program activities.

The multiplicity and complexity of older immigrants demand a multidimensional approach to social work practice. As a profession that is dedicated to helping people in need and to address social problems, growing numbers of older immigrants in the United States call for social work practice with cultural competence and the ability to understand the target population’s special issues and needs in service delivery.

Jing Tan is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work.
Sarah Wu (Mrs. Q),
Fed Up with Lunch
(Chronicle Books, 2011)
Charles Angell

Yuck!
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I won’t eat corn chowder. Never. Ever. I don’t care if it’s prepared by Emeril LaGasse and served by Rachel Ray. I won’t touch the stuff. Why? Every Tuesday’s lunch menu at Plympton Elementary School offered a bowl of watery milk corn chowder with yellow niblets floating in it. Every spoonful stimulated a gag reflex. For six years I had to confront this Tuesday ordeal which, as you can see, still influences my diet choices some sixty years later.

Sarah Wu’s Fed Up with Lunch makes much the same point about the role today’s school lunch menus play in her student’s dietary choices. Wu, a speech pathologist at a Chicago elementary school, found herself one day having to rely on the school lunch and was upset at the items placed on her tray, most of them wrapped in plastic which might contain chicken nuggets, pizza, tater tots, or other highly processed foods similar to the fast foods served by the chains. Wu resolved to raise people’s awareness of what she saw as a serious problem with children’s nutrition; she began a blog, calling herself Mrs. Q, to begin a conversation about school lunch programs. “If more people knew,” she writes, “about the pathetic quality of food in public schools, and—at least in my district [Chicago Public School District 299]—

the limited amount of time kids have to eat their lunches, surely more people would want to do something about it.” Turns out she was right; her blog rapidly brought responses from around the country.

Starting in January 2010, Wu decided to eat school lunch every day of the school year “and blog about it.” She would place the day’s menu items on her tray, return to her classroom on the pretext she had work to do, and use her cell phone to take pictures of the day’s menu selections. (My Kindle reproduces the pictures in black and white; for the full color photos, one needs to access the Fed Up with Lunch blog site—http://fedupwithlunch.com/.) Despite her reservations about being considered a “whistleblower” and perhaps jeopardizing her employment—not very likely—Wu kept at her project. “Amazingly,” she explains, “my blog soon became the poster child for school lunch reform.” What bothered Wu and others was an awareness that because many students’ parents worked for fast food franchises and would bring home food from their jobs, students ate at home what they were being served at school. “Chances were good that those of my students whose parents worked for Taco Bell, McDonald’s, Starbucks, and Subway would get similar food when their parents brought home leftovers from their jobs.” One popular and frequently served item was chicken nuggets. “I’d always assumed that chicken nuggets were fried pieces of plain chicken breast meat. I guess those food scientists had me fooled; chicken nuggets are only about 50 percent chicken. Most of the ingredients are modified corn bits (cornstarch, corn fillers, dextrose, emulsifiers).” Wu laments the lack of fresh vegetable and fruits available to the students. No opportunity existed for them to learn about good nutrition.

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) sets school lunch nutrition requirements. The school lunch
program originated in 1946 as a means for distributing surplus food to hungry children. The National School Lunch Act (signed by President Truman) has over the years developed some unintended consequences. Wu notes that French fries count as a vegetable, that “stiff, prepackaged breadstick made of white flour [satisfies] the USDA's requirement for grains,” that “a piece of school pizza counts as one serving of grain” though rice “only counts as one serving,” and that, incredibly, a frozen juice bar called a “fruit icee” met the USDA requirement for a serving of fruit. Wu observes that her elementary students often will eat the juice bar first and leave themselves insufficient time to consume the rest of the meal. The frequent reliance on fruit drinks and chocolate milk has the children “assaulting their bodies with large quantities of sugar.”

Wu uses school lunch as a lens for focusing on additional problems within the school day. Most obvious is the insufficient time, twenty minutes, allowed for students to eat their lunch. Lunch periods are too often scheduled to meet the demands of the school day rather than the demands of a child's appetite. Small children, she points out, have difficulty opening the plastic packages and must wait for an adult to help them. Many children would throw most of their lunch in the trash. Wu begins to notice the enormous quantity of trash generated by the plastic utensils (“sporks”), the cellophane packaging, the styrofoam trays, none of it recycled. “Most American kids know,” Wu says, “it’s not okay to litter or throw garbage in the street, but then why is it okay to throw excessive amounts of paper, plastic, and food waste into our landfills directly from our school cafeterias?” Further, Wu brings up the accelerating trend to eliminate recess from the elementary school day. “In face of the growing concern over childhood obesity, it seems illogical to eliminate recess. But school districts are under pressure to fill students’ days with testing and academics and … recess looks like open space in the day.” A short recess before lunch allows children to release pent-up energy and return to class better prepared to concentrate. Recess also allows children to develop social interactions. Yet, as some argue, eliminating recess reduces playground bullying. As a skinny, shy, asthmatic kid whose mother made him wear shorts to elementary school, I harbor no nostalgia for recess except that I couldn’t wait for it. When I finally knocked Roger my tormenter on his kiester, urged on by my sixth grade teacher Mr. Furillo, my self-esteem skyrocketed. I hope no one misconstrues me when I assert that Mr. Furillo taught Roger and me a valuable lesson.

The school day exists as a microcosm for the wider American society. Americans have developed a genius for sending mixed messages to one another. On one hand we tell students to recycle and support sustainability; on the other we place them in contexts where they can’t help but produce quantities of trash and garbage. We tell students that success in the global economy requires cooperation and collaboration, then place them in contexts where they must ruthlessly compete with one another on standardized tests and the athletic fields. (Now we’re saying that student performance on standardized tests will determine a teacher’s employment status and express shock when students and teachers both start to cheat.) Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum in That Used to be Us: How America Fell Behind in the World We Invented and How We Can Come Back (a tract whose more accurate title might be If the World is Flat How Come Everything in America Is Still Rolling Downhill?) write “education should focus on the whole person—that come to produce better citizens, not just better test takers. If our schools teach American children what it means to be an American citizen, they—and America—will have a much better chance of passing on the American formula for greatness to future generations.” The arrogance here, the notion that such concepts as ‘whole person,’ better citizen, ’American formula,’ ‘greatness’ might be viewed as uncontested, simply astounds. Diane Ravich, in a recent New York Review of Books article, makes the point that “the critics of test-based accountability and free-market policies do not have a name, so the reformers call them ‘anti-reform.’ It might be better to describe them as defenders of common sense and sound education.”

Sarah Wu attempts to apply some common sense and sound educational policy to the elementary school day. But, it’s that “American formula” that likely has Sarah Wu wondering. A dedicated teacher, she began her Fed Up with Lunch blog worried that it might jeopardize her employment. Her employer, a school system bureaucracy, might see her efforts to promote better school lunches and more enlightened school policy as somehow subversive and put the ‘institutional press’ on her to desist. Wu’s husband told her that as long as the blog was fun and doing some good, she should keep at it. I’d suggest that the blog became Wu’s recess from the pressures and rigidities—even the absurdities—of the public school day; she could blow off steam in arena that championed social networking. Wu kept at it and has become a celebrity—the American formula.

Charles Angell is a Professor of English and Book Review Editor of Bridgewater Review.
I was, as I often do in the summer, hanging around a beaver swamp to photograph dragonflies and damselflies. I arose from the crouch I was in and turned around to move to a new spot when I noticed this spider a few feet away. As I moved closer, I noticed the damselfly in the spider’s grasp. Luck, pure and simple. Good in the case of the spider and photographer; bad for the damselfly.