

Meeting 6 • 23 January 2014

Week 2 (cont'd): Ships & boats, roads & paths, legs & arms; start of Week 3: Lands, climates & people – then and now Version: 1/23/14

pictures of the week



(held over from Week 2):
Humboldt's canoe (source:
Botting, *Humboldt and the
Cosmos*, p. 103 [0027])

thought-bite of the week:

"[I]n these countries nobody would dream of going out to look for alpine plants, or to study rock strata, or take barometers up to high altitudes. They are used to a dull domestic life; [apparently] they live not to enjoy life but to prolong it."

(Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, p. 12)



Humboldt, Bonpland, and their
scientific equipment (source:
Botting, *Humboldt and the
Cosmos*, p. 98-9 [0026])

mini-text of the week (start):

"The farm we lodged at was a fine sugar-cane plantation.... The owner's house is situated on a hillock surrounded by huts for the negroes...."

Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, p. 22 (read more)

Materials for today

portraits of AvH; work sample: "Leaving Home"; apps related to navigation; 2013 projects

Topics for today (key to symbols)

(05') Thought-bite of the week: Data points vs data ranges: |----*----| What they knew then, what we know now (and how much of what we know now is based on incorrect knowledge). How errors of measurement magnify (example: astronomy) - a recent article about such (*Economist* magazine, see handout for meeting #5, especially final paragraphs about extrapolation)

(5') Mini-text of the week: The tricky topic of slavery - 1) Could free people create a viable economy in the tropics? 2) Review of a book about slavery (*Economist* magazine, see handout for today), as an example related to the upcoming book review assignment (reading to begin soon - after we know your subject-area interests)

*collective cultural
issues*

(15') Continuation of quantitative activity and expansion to applications related to travel, exploration, and sustainability (basic quantities worksheet, stage 2 • later: basic quantities worksheet stage 3 • basic quantities worksheet stage 4). Comment: Last week people filled in a fair amount of quantities, but indicated very little about how they actually determined those quantities (whether by showing calculations or by giving the sources of their information, for example "personal experience on a flight" or "remembered from middle school math").

The LONGITUDE problem - key to understanding accuracy of mapping and, therefore, recording geophysical data, including weather/climate and biology. Why the need for accurate clocks on board and in the wild?

Seat-of-pants calculation: How many miles to a degree of longitude at PDX's latitude (~45 degrees)? Idle airplane speculation: if we're flying back to PDX from NYC, starting at sundown in NYC, will our plane fly fast enough that the sun will appear not to go down at all during our flight?

Now a hands-on experience to get the feel of trying to navigate 1800-style (but with instruments much more primitive than theirs): taking a sky-sighting on a rolling ship. But first: How closely can we estimate, with our bodies, degrees of angle? And a "rule of thumb" for doing that. So how wide (in degrees) is the moon as seen from Earth? Why does it "look" so much bigger?

Advanced version: If you're at Cannon Beach saluting the beautiful sunset with a favorite person and beverage, how long ago might your friends in PDX might have been doing the same?

A look at some mobile apps (here: iPhone/iPad) about navigation and measurement. We'll use some of them later to measure heights and distances.

(15') SINQing the Humboldt canoe, so that we can then load it and travel safely in it. 1) "Brute force" solution: actually sinking a similar canoe - will try to arrange it; 2) "Semi-Brute Force Solution": "dry dock" simulation using Laura Dassow Well's description of Humboldt's canoe and its cargo of people, equipment, and various critters- we'll do that right in the classroom; 3) "Smart Person Solution": saving time and sweat by (e-)pencil-and-paper calculation of volume and "ball park" estimation of weight and displacement. Maybe: Worksheet about volume, weight, and displacement

(05') Time limit to be strictly observed, since these topics will come up again): Where are we going from here? What about writing assignments, the book review, the projects? Writing #3 (about your education) starts today and prepares you for projects (and rest of life). Midterm will be at end of week 5. Writing #4 (Humboldt-related species) starts at end of week 5, after you have learned enough to understand the assignment. Writing #5 (book review) starts next week, after we have enough info about your interests to help you find a book. Serious group project work starts with meeting #10. Examples, with their scores/grades, will be (have already been!) provided, and the activities will be discussed in mentor sessions and in class. Here (thanks JE!) is one entertaining example of a group project about food in olden times. You could do worse than convert that into a Humboldt-related project. About grades: AmAze me. Now for the next activities/ assignments and how they related to the larger course goals.

(05') About Humboldt-named schools and their role in this course; featured schools: PDX (now closed - summer of 2012), Arizona, CA (Humboldt BAY HS), Illinois (AvH Chicago), NYC, Saskatchewan, Mexico City, Puebla, Berlin-Tegel, Hamburg, Rüsselsheim, Kazakhstan; reinterpreting the past better for ourselves by (re)interpreting it for others. Upcoming: choosing your Humboldt-named school as source of info about education and possible beneficiary of your project(s).

(10') presentation about educational standards and their parts in the course: 1) evaluating own education; 2) helping others to learn; preview of upcoming writing assignment and skills questionnaire. Documents: Oregon preK-12 standards for Visual & Performing Arts (0693), especially pp. 8-10, 12, 14, & (especially) 26 (see handout for meeting #5). Discussion topic: which standards were addressed by writing about the Humboldt portrait?

(5') Wrapup: The Weitsch portrait of AvH - relation to long tradition of portrait painting (and photography, including the pics you take of yourselves to express your identity/ies); the emergence of the scholar/ scientists as claimed co-equal of the ruler, churchman, soldier.

(05') about writing skills and critical thinking: ways to structure "Leaving Home" (abstract>specific, specific>abstract, only specific and let reader figure out the point); work sample (see handout from meeting #3); importance of a concept of *change* (in our individual lives, in development of human thought - was that concept always around? -, in study of origins of sustainable environmentalism). Some words/ phrases that can undermine your writing: multiple, pertaining, prior to, I think, in my opinion, and '-ing" (Prior to leaving my home> Before I left home OR I did x. Then I left home. OR I left home Before I left, I ...)

(0') Start reading these on your own time: Previews & announcements: 1) Note how I have annotated the outlines for previous meetings with comments (key to symbols) about what happened during them; 2) Portraits of ourselves as environmentalist-explorers. 3) Upcoming: choosing areas of specialization for individual reading, lesson-plan project, team project. 4) Keeping up with the reading - see "schedule" page; maps now available; pagination of printed vs. e-books. 5) a leftover from the Hawaiian trip - while you're thinking about such things as chocolate, macadamis nuts, and coffee, look at *Jaguars and Electric Eels* (p. 21) and these links ([link 1](#) • [link 2](#)) to see how modern AvH was in his beverages, and read *Jaguars* p. 44 about his fashionable food interests. 6) Soon we'll load and crew a mockup Humboldt Canoe - still thinking about SINQing a real canoe (depending on local warming/cooling)

added new office/coffee hour: Thursday
after class
Anyone for lunch Fridays?

The slave trade

Not black and white

The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World. By Greg Grandin. Metropolitan Books; 360 pages; \$30

HOW come the Age of Liberty was also the Age of Slavery? Greg Grandin, an American historian, wrestles with a paradox: the way slavery expanded after the Enlightenment and at a time when cries of freedom were still reverberating from the American and French revolutions.

His new book, "The Empire of Necessity", is inspired by Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno", an imaginative account by the man who wrote "Moby Dick" of a bloody slave revolt aboard a Spanish ship in the South Pacific in 1805. Led by a man called Babo and his son, Mori, the slaves murdered many of the Spanish crew and took control of the ship. When the vessel subsequently got into distress, the west Africans deceived their rescuer, Captain Amasa Delano, an American seal-hunter and a distant relative of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, pretending they were still slaves. They forced the ship's captain and the few surviving members of its crew to play the role of their masters.

As well as correcting the factual errors in Melville's book, Mr Grandin uses Captain Delano's account of this and other incidents to explore the complexities and ambiguities of the Atlantic slave trade. It was not just, as is commonly supposed, a matter of white villains and black victims. The crews of naval and merchant fleets of the time included "men of colour"—even, in a few instances, as captains.

When, as happened during the Napoleonic wars, a slaver's ship was captured by French privateers, the blacks aboard were often treated more carefully than the white seamen. The blacks were prized goods and their worth soared as commodity-based booms in the New World overwhelmed the sentiments of liberty, equality and fraternity. Once enslaved, the

The joy of reading

Literary voyeurism

Why I Read: The Serious Pleasure of Books. By Wendy Lesser. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 240 pages; \$25 and £17.99

JAMES WOOD, a British critic, fell in love with Gustave Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* when he imagined her fondling the satin slippers she wore at a great ball, "the soles of which were yellowed with wax from the dance floor". Henry Miller, though born to Lutheran parents in New York, had a liking for Plutarch, Petronius, Marcel Proust and that dotty Russian theosophist, Madame Blavatsky, the original New Ager. How do people know this? Because both authors came clean about their literary passions.

Writers are made by their reading, which is why it is such fun to peer at their bookshelves and inspect the dog-eared pages, the turned-down corners. More than 50 years after Miller published "The Books in My Life", Wendy Lesser has brought out an equally personal reading memoir. Founder and editor of the *Three-penny Review*, an American literary magazine, Ms Lesser is known for her

Africans were valuable as "investments (purchased and then rented out as labourers), credit (used to secure loans), property, commodities, and capital, making them an odd mix of abstract and concrete values."

Blacks as well as whites profited from the Atlantic slave trade. The shippers and retailers of slaves were mostly Europeans or white Americans, but the wholesalers were often black. Slavery existed throughout west Africa, and during the wars that convulsed the upper Niger valley in the early 19th century prisoners seized during the fighting were sold to Europeans by African rulers.

In describing the awfulness of their fate, Mr Grandin recalls the observations of a slave-ship's surgeon. Cargo bays were

non-fiction writing: her examination of Shostakovich's quartets and a study of the subterranean in literature entitled "The Life Below the Ground".

Her new book, "Why I Read", is a model for the modern age, with a list of 100 books to read for pleasure and a notice at the back advertising an online guide for reading groups. But her instincts are those of her literary forebears. She recommends Henry James and Patricia Highsmith for plot, Charles Dickens for character and Javier Marías, a Spanish writer, for being so good at mining the "uncertain borderline between the dead and the living". For novelty she prescribes Geoffrey Chaucer, Jonathan Swift and Miguel de Cervantes, and in modern times, David Foster Wallace. To Russia, for love, would be Ms Lesser's advice. Only Fyodor Dostoyevsky can offer a double lesson on the love of God and the love of a good woman.

"Reading literature", she says, "is a way of reaching back to something bigger and older and different." How very consoling.

poorly ventilated and baked under the equatorial sun, leading to festering and putrefaction. Slave ships could be smelled from miles away. Sometimes the floors of the holds would become so covered with "blood and mucus" that they resembled a slaughter house. "It is not", the surgeon said, "in the power of the human imagination to picture to itself a situation more dreadful or disgusting."

Unfortunately, the horrors in Mr Grandin's history are unrelenting. His is a book without heroes. The brave battlers against the gruesome slave business hardly get a look in, although it was they who eventually prevailed. Prominent among them were William Wilberforce and other evangelical Christians. Along with their Quaker allies, they led the campaign that persuaded Britain's Parliament to abolish the slave trade in 1807. Credit is also due, but is hardly given by Mr Grandin, to the anti-slavery patrols of the Royal Navy which freed at least 150,000 west Africans from slave ships during the 19th century.

Yet the efforts of the slave traders to hide their captives from the Royal Navy and to pretend that they were shipping only general merchandise still echo in a common saying in Brazil about deliberate attempts to deceive: *para inglês ver* (for the English to see). A better balanced history would have included the good guys, too. ■

