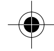
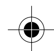


Marshall High School, Los Angeles, 1996.
Photographs in this article taken by Jeff Yoshimi and Toshi Yoshimi.



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Hapas at a Los Angeles High-School: Context and Phenomenology

JEFF YOSHIMI

Whereas early scholars assumed that multiracial experience is problematic (so-called "marginal man" theories), recent research has recognized a wider variety of mixed-race experiences.[1] Implicit in much of this recent research is the idea that when and where mixed-race people live affect how they experience themselves and others. In what follows I elaborate this notion of context-dependence using foodways research and phenomenology.

I use foodways research to describe the region surrounding Marshall High School in northeast Los Angeles as well as the experiences of *Hapas*[2] who went to Marshall between 1983 and 1992. To describe the Marshall, I survey public eating establishments, treating signs, menus, and market shelves as clues to underlying cultural dynamics. To describe the experiences of *Hapas* living in that area, I recount interviews whose emphasis on domestic eating practices allowed me to tease out implicit cultural sensitivities.

Having described this context/experience ecology, I interpret it using concepts from philosophical phenomenology (roughly speaking, the study of conscious experience). In particular, I claim that for *Hapas* in the Marshall area, ethnic and multiethnic meaning played a "silently effective" role in the experience of self and others, except in special situations where ethnicity was "disengaged" from a background of implicit meaning. This analysis contravenes existing discussions of multiraciality, which tend to assume some sort of overt or focused awareness of multiracial heritage.

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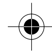

Context: Marshall High School

The area within Marshall's boundaries (as defined by the L.A. Unified School District) is northeast of Downtown Los Angeles, and covers parts of East Hollywood, Los Feliz, Silverlake, and Atwater. In 1987, when I attended Marshall, the student body was 3 percent African-American, 22 percent Asian, 9 percent Filipino, 49 percent Latino, and 17 percent White.[3] Although there is no data to indicate what percentage of the student body was mixed-race at that time, the juxtaposition and interaction of food items in local restaurants, market shelves, and storefronts reflect the area's underlying cultural dynamic.[4]

The streets are replete with culinary juxtaposition. The Oki food stand in East Hollywood advertises "Polish sausages, steaks, pastrami, homemade burritos, and teriyaki." Up the street at the Los Feliz Deli, one can purchase Armenian and Persian delicacies, as well as deli-sandwiches, American beer, or Japanese crackers. A mini-mall marquis across the street from L.A. City College (where my parents met thirty years ago) advertises Japanese, Salvadoran, French American, Filipino, and Korean foods. At Tommy's Burgers in Atwater one can purchase grilled steak, teriyaki chicken, or a taco. Condiments include a Chinese bowl filled with jalapeños.

Convergences as well as juxtapositions are evident in local eating establishments. For example, in 1974, a Thai immigrant bought El Chico's in Silverlake from a Mexican family. The owner continued to cook the dishes served by the original proprietors, but added Thai iced coffee and iced tea to the menu. In addition to juxtaposing Thai and Mexican menu-items, the owner also created dishes from the integration of Thai and Mexican ingredients. The hot sauce, for example, utilizes Thai spices as well as traditional Mexican peppers. Netty's up the street serves a range of dishes from pasta to Cajun to Pan American (Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, and Mexican). Among the many multiethnic creations at Netty's is the roasted Pasilla pepper with shrimp, a variant on the Salvadoran Chile Relleno which is open-flame roasted rather than deep-fried, and stuffed with shrimp, corn, and feta cheese (non-standard fillings). At Tami's cafe on Hyperion, American breakfasts were once served with Japanese rice. The Wednesday special was shortribs, eggs, and rice with gravy. Menu-items such as these show how foodways can bleed into one another at the intersections of a multiculinary neighborhood,

This pattern of cohabitation and convergence is revealed not only by the food of the area, but also by its signage. In a recent study of a larger area of Los Angeles which encompasses the Marshall district, Sojin Kim and Somi Kim conclude that:

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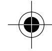
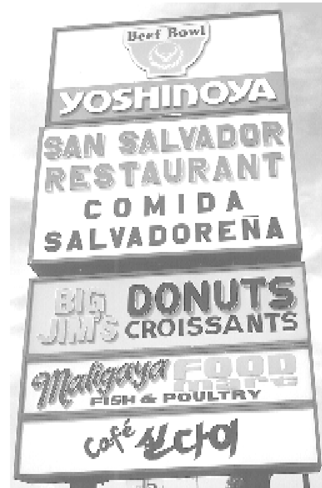


> signs in certain neighborhoods graphically demonstrate that Los Angeles is not just a city of physical intersections, but symbolic ones as well, where different languages and cultural groups [and culinary styles] oftentimes intersect and juxtapose one another.[5]



Marquis at Vermont and Melrose, across the street from L.A. City College.

Two examples they cite are a Middle-Eastern restaurant and a Korean-American restaurant (where the food is "a fusion of Korean and Western styles") whose storefronts integrate Roman lettering with Arabic and Korean transliterations, respectively.

Commercial food establishments and local signage reflect co-presence and interaction of Armenian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, Thai, and Salvadoran populations in the area. Such evidence suggests that the area is populated not only by a diversity of ethnic groups (which have been inflected to various degrees in their American context), but also by a variety of *convergences* between these groups.[6]

It is important to situate this cultural dynamic in the broader context of urban Los Angeles, where a neighborhood can change dramatically within a generation. Tami's cafe is now a sushi bar. The Oki cafe is defunct. The marquis across the street from L.A. City College will probably have changed by the time this article goes to press (at least one of the businesses has already gone under). My conclusions must therefore be viewed as plausible only for the timeframe under study, and indeed, we will see evidence that the phenomenology I describe is currently undergoing change.

Phenomenology: *Hapas* at Marshall High School, 1983-1992

The interacting foodways of the Marshall area show that students lived in a culturally complex area. Having described this context, I now consider how *Hapas* at Marshall experienced ethnicity.[7]

This section is based on eleven semi-structured interviews generated by a snowball method from contacts I had as a former student. This small, familiar sample was well-suited to my phenomenological approach. I was able to observe and interact with the subjects in a natural way, gaining detailed insight into their "lifeworlds" of daily activity.[8] Moreover, I conducted as many interviews as possible with more than one participant, usually from the same social group at

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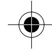
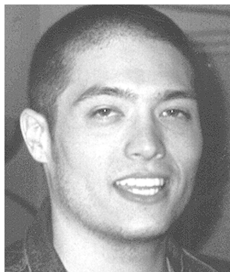


Marshall. The resulting crosstalk was invaluable, revealing subtleties which might not have emerged otherwise.

The eleven subjects attended Marshall between 1983 and 1992. Of these, three were Chinese / Anglo, three were Filipino / Anglo, four were Japanese / Anglo, and one was Korean / Anglo.[9] There were six male and five female respondents, from a variety of class backgrounds. None were strongly religious, and none spoke an Asian language fluently. All but one of the subjects' parents met in the United States, for the most part in the Los Angeles area. Their Asian parents varied between first and third generation. All but three were familiar with the term *Hapa*, and several used it during the interview. The interviews contained questions about ethnic and multiethnic identity, as well as questions about food, and were conducted between March and September 1994.[10] I conducted additional informal interviews with African American/Anglo, Armenian/Greek, and Cuban/Italian/Chinese alumni. I also consulted my sister (Japanese/Anglo), who attended Marshall through 1995.


Sean McKean

When asked how they experienced ethnicity at Marshall—whether it was in any sense an "issue" in their daily lives—every subject responded that it wasn't, at least not in any negative sense. Roy Cui (Filipino/Anglo) went so far as to say, "If it was an issue, it was on the side of it was kind of cooler to be a minority, because there's a lot of minorities here." For the most part, ethnicity doesn't seem to have been an issue at all for these subjects, positive or negative. As Sean McKean (Japanese/Anglo) put it, "I wouldn't say it [a mixed-ethnicity] was a positive thing either, but I never got bothered." Such responses suggest that ethnicity was not only non-problematic for these students, but that it was a largely unnoticed or non-salient part of their school experience.[11]

Nye Liu

Some noted that ethnicity may have been more focally experienced within certain cliques at Marshall. Renard Dubois (Chinese/French) and Nye Liu (Chinese/German) concurred that members of the Chinese Student Federation "only hung out with Chinese people, like hard-core, like when you say Chinese they're not Americanized either." This comment highlights the importance of linguistic and generational factors in ethnic experience. Since all of the subjects I interviewed spoke English as their primary language and grew up in the United States, they may have avoided issues faced by other, less ac-

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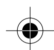
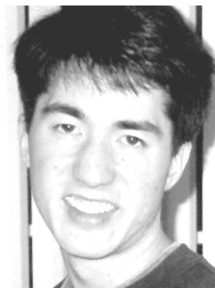
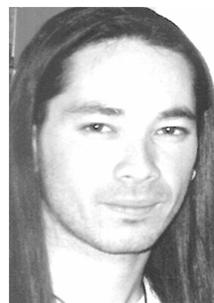


culturated classmates. As Dubois put it, "there's this side of Marshall we didn't see; I think ethnicity was a big part of it."

Also significant is the fact that most of the subjects I interviewed are mixed-race Asian and Anglo, and not, for example, mixed-race Latino or mixed-race African-American. Although the mixed-race Armenian, Latino, and African American students I informally interviewed reported no negative experiences at Marshall relating to their ethnicity, a larger study of these groups (or of non-English-speaking students) would probably reveal other perspectives on the issue of ethnic experience in the Marshall area.


Renard Dubois

On the other hand, most of the subjects *were* focally aware of clique or social status at school. The interviewees came from a broad span of Marshall's cliques, from "drill-team/cheerleader" to "stage-crew stoner" to "academic." In fact, those I interviewed differentiated Marshall's 3,000 students into over fifty social groups, whose wide-range is indicated in the following subject's list: "intellectual, artsy, surfer gang group, other gang groups, basketball players, eleventh grade boys." Several pointed out that for the most part, these cliques were not organized around ethnicity. According to Lih Russel (Chinese/British), "the groups at Marshall were usually differentiated by interest. It definitely didn't seem to be an ethnic thing." Sean McKean said that he was part of "a multicultural bunch of guys that just were together because they liked to party." Note that "multicultural" is included almost as an afterthought, perhaps in response to the context of the interview; the emphasis is on "liked to party." As Kirk Topekian (Armenian/Greek) put it, "It's not *where* you were from, it's *how* you were, if you were cool, partied, you know."


Lih Russel

However, several emphasized that certain groups *were* organized around ethnicity, even if the rest were multicultural. Bruce Moore (Korean/Irish), who identified as a "Silver Lake skater," said

> I only remember the Filipino races really isolating themselves as far as that being one clique. . .and the other people I felt were just friends that were into the same thing, you know like the leadership group, and the scholars, and the people that liked to party and hang out.

Midori Nakano (Japanese/Anglo), the most recent graduate, made a stronger claim. She said that Marshall was "definitely divided up by

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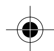

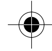

ethnicity," adding that "the group of people I hung out with were really the most diverse. . .we always wanted to venture out but people . . .didn't want to be bothered." This may indicate a trend towards increased ethnic differentiation at the school.[12]

Bruce Moore

When asked explicitly what ethnicity they identified with, eight of the eleven subjects responded "American," "White," or "Caucasian," citing a number of reasons. Tracy Stokes (Japanese/Anglo) attributed her identity to phenotype: "since I look more Caucasian I guess I identify myself more Caucasian." Others cited language. Bruce Moore said he feels more American "'cause I don't speak Korean and I don't have an Irish accent." Some were reluctant to identify as American, but did so anyway. After describing how proud he was of his British citizenship, Lih Russel admitted, "I'm probably more American than anything else, even though I'm not American."

These responses seem, at least in part, to be an artifact of the question. When asked to identify oneself, there is an implicit pressure to give a simple, one-word response—to "check one." Perhaps because of their linguistic and generational distance from Asian culture (none speak an Asian language or are from Asia) they were more ready to identify as American or "Caucasian" than Asian.

Midori Nakano

Several subjects resisted the impulse to give a one-word response. Roy Cui said, "If anything I feel pretty much unidentified, I feel kind of free-floating . . .a lot of my friends are different ethnicities, so I've dabbled with a bunch of different cultures, so I don't feel too tied to any one." Courtney Hannah (Japanese/Anglo) said that in addition to identifying with Hawaiian culture (she and her family spent part of their lives living in Hawai'i), she "marks every box which is applicable" when asked to choose an ethnicity.

Although most identified themselves as American, the subjects' responses to other questions—in particular the questions about food—made it clear that an ethnic consciousness was at some level operative in their daily experiences. All participants were familiar with Asian foods and food-practices, and many recounted unique multiculinary foods in their domestic past. What is significant about this is that the same subjects who denied an Asian identity went on to *demonstrate* it, to varying degrees, in their understanding of Asian foodways. For ex-

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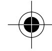

Courtney Hannah

ample, Nye Liu, after stating, "I think probably by now I've lost all the Asian that's in me other than my blood," went on to talk in detail about a variety of Chinese dishes. Renard Dubois, who is also Chinese/ Anglo (and who also identified as American), was familiar with the dishes Liu described, and at times the discussion drifted away from the interview and was entirely between Liu and Dubois. Here is an extended example:

Tracy Stokes

Dubois: Oh yeah, my Mom made that too. It's like soggy rice soup.
Liu: Sticky rice soup.
Yoshimi: Could you spell it?
Dubois: J-O-K, you can't really spell it in English.
Liu: Rice that's basically cooked forever.
Dubois: Yeah, you cook it forever until it turns into one homogeneous mass.
Liu: It's really good.
Yoshimi: Is it like that 8,000-year-old egg or whatever?
Dubois: No, no, no, that's different, I can't stand that.
Liu: Yeah, it doesn't ferment, which is good.
Yoshimi: How long do they leave those eggs? What less appealing idea is there than like. . .
Liu: Rotten eggs?
Dubois: They're not old, well they like put it in ash which chemically cooks it for about a month.
Liu: Yeah, it's very natural, like a month and a half. I never got into that. The funkiest Chinese stuff I ate was the salted pork stuff, which I occasionally like, [to Dubois] you know the salted steamed pork stuff I'm talking about?
Dubois: That's not weird, that's not weird.
Liu: Well sometimes, like at Phoenix Inn they put the fermented vegetable in it, and it's somewhat reminiscent of Kim-Chee. The stuff gets really stinky. It's good, taste it, but it smells real nasty.

Notice that towards the end of this dialogue the conversation is exclusively between Liu and Dubois. At some point during the exchange I was excluded. So even though these self-identified Americans can't speak Chinese, they demonstrate an insider's fluency in the values and meanings associated with Chinese food.

At the same time, Liu and Dubois' comments indicate that they have been socialized into an American understanding of food, where what is normal is viewed in contrast to the "real" stuff, much of which is considered strange, or in their terms, "funky," "nasty" or "weird." This kind of model, which places Asian foods on a kind of continuum

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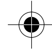

from "Americanized" to "real," emerged in many of the interviews. Lih Russel used it to describe his mother's food

> when she did cook I didn't really find it too edible or palatable. . .it's not what you would consider Americanized Chinese food, like Chinese restaurant style. I don't even know if it's Chinese style. I think it's her style.

Cindy Fowler (Filipino/Anglo) tells this story about "chocolate meat":

> I used to like this stuff called chocolate meat, and I found out what it was, and I didn't like it no more. . .when I was little, I was like, "ooh yeah chocolate meat, mmm chocolate" and then I got all this like, "do you know what that is?" and I said, "No what is it?" and [they said], "Oh that's pig gizzards, and pig gross stuff, and everything gross in a pig, and their blood."

The discussions of food revealed the same pattern of juxtaposition and convergence identified above in the commercial landscape of the Marshall area. Domestic juxtapositions were especially evident at the holidays. Several participants described Thanksgiving and Christmas as a time when Asian and American foods would share space on the dinner table. Midori Nakano recalled that there was "always rice" at the holidays, in addition to the yams, green beans, and turkey. Likewise, Susan Fowler said:

> At Thanksgiving we always had a turkey, cranberry sauce, *Pancit*, rice, and it was funny cause we had all the American stuff, like yams and all that stuff, and then we had the Filipino stuff.

Similar juxtapositions are evident in Tracy Stokes' cupboard, where seaweed and dried mushrooms are visible above Idaho Spuds and American cereals (in fact, the topmost shelf is explicitly labeled "Japanese food"). In her refrigerator, Japanese delicacies are placed alongside ketchup and mustard. A sort of additive model of cultural juxtaposition is evident at this level of cupboards, refrigerators, and dinner tables (the same pattern observed above on the market shelves and menus of the surrounding community), where the co-presence of ethnic groups is visible through the co-presence of ethnic foods.

Just as culinary juxtapositions in the Marshall area were associated with convergences, so too with the culinary practices of those I interviewed. Nakano said that at Thanksgiving she would pour gravy over the turkey and rice. When asked if she enjoyed this gravy/turkey/rice combo she responded, "Yeah, actually that's good. I like that. It's just part of the meal." Renard Dubois once ate Lasagna with oyster sauce. Courtney Hannah describes a wide array of "shoyu" (soy sauce) combinations, from

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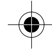
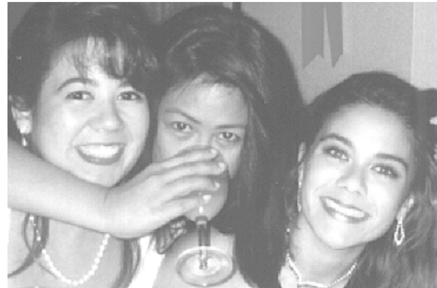


shoyu Spam to *shoyu* Vienna sausage to *shoyu* egg sandwiches. Her recipe for the latter:

> you put egg, *shoyu*, sugar, beat it up. . .[put] American cheese on the bread and toast it. . .until like you can put the two halves together. Then you spread lots of mayonnaise on it, and you put the *shoyu* egg in the middle, and you eat it.


Susan (left) and Cindy Fowler (right).

Sean McKean described his mother's food as

> a mix between White trash and Japanese. . .she would make a teriyaki chicken, she'd like, bake it, and there would be squash and green onions, and she'd cook all that together, and that was probably about as Japanese as it got.

Although such unique foods indicate a shared multiethnic experience with food, it is interesting to note that many subjects were surprised by my intimate questions, and that I sometimes had to dig deep to get the best stories. Their experience with multiculinary foods, and their sense of ethnic identity in general, tended to maintain a low profile in their daily lives, informing their self-understanding but rarely surfacing to the level of focused, thematic consciousness.

In contrast, their experiences with such characteristic mixed-race phenomena as being asked "What are you?" were more salient, although not for that reason problematic.[13] In fact, not a single respondent found the question "What are you?" to be offensive, though all were familiar with the question itself. Lih Russel used a car metaphor to describe his experience with "What are you?"

> It's sort of like if you were driving around a car with a big old crash, you know, in the side of it, [so that] people keep on asking "What happened?"

Cindy Fowler relayed this story:

> A lot of people are like, "What are you?" and I'm like, "an alien". . .a lot of people ask, everywhere I go. If they don't ask I'll bring it up, [I'll ask] "What do you think I am? Betcha don't know."

Notice that Fowler would elicit the question if she wasn't asked. Rather than being offended by the attention her ambiguous appearance generated, she embraced it. In a similar vein, Bruce Moore called the question "a good conversation starter." Courtney Hannah said, "to

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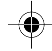

me it was kind of a novelty to be half-Asian. . .it was kind of like, "ooh!, you know?" Susan Fowler (Filipino/Anglo) said, "I've been called exotic, which I think is very flattering. People say, 'I've never seen anyone who looks like you, you're very unique,'. . . so that's a good thing." One respondent went so far as to say she wished she looked *more* mixed-race: "I don't look Japanese, I don't even look *Hapa* to some people. . .I like [being asked 'What are you?']. . .I guess sometimes I wish I looked more half and half."

Although the respondents unanimously denied being offended by the question "What are you?," some pointed out that in certain contexts it could be offensive or annoying. Midori Nakano (Japanese/White) said,

> In a way I'm flattered [by the question], but sometimes I'm a little offended because they'll say, "Oh are you Chinese or what?" and I don't think that's the right approach to asking somebody.

When asked what separates the "right approach" from the wrong, Nakano invoked contextual factors: "it varies—who the person is, where I am, what kind of atmosphere we're in, the background too, how forward they are, how much they know." Others also emphasized the context of the question. Cindy Fowler, who was not offended by the question and said she herself sometimes brings it up, added that it bothers her when people guess wrong or are insistent about how they think she looks,

> . . .it just bugs me when people say something that's wrong. . .sometimes people say, "Oh I thought you were just White with a tan," and I'm like, "Oh all year long?" and they're like, "You go to a tanning salon, I know it, I know it," and I'm like, "it's just the Filipino in me," and they believe it.

So, although most of the subjects did not mind or even elicited discussion of their racial appearance, exception was made when the issue was posed in an accusatory or insistent way.

The ethnic phenomenology of *Hapas* at Marshall is a subtle affair. For the most part, clique or social group rather than ethnicity was the focus of human interaction, except in special circumstances such as discussions about one's racial appearance. Even here, however, ethnicity functioned as something matter-of-fact or conversational. It was just something to talk about. Despite the fact that ethnicity was for the most part non-focal for these students, their fluency in Asian food practices shows that ethnic sensitivities contributed to their identity. Moreover, their common experience with racial ambiguity and convergent culinary practices indicate a uniquely *multi*-ethnic aspect of their identity.

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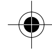
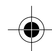
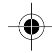


Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenological concepts can be used to interpret these observations, and moreover are elaborated and clarified by this contact with a real-life case study.[14] Generally speaking, "phenomenology" refers to any kind of qualitative analysis of experience, for example, my discussion above of *Hapas* at Marshall. In a more specific sense, "phenomenology" refers to a philosophical discipline originating with the work of Edmund Husserl at the turn of the century. The analyses which follow are phenomenological in this narrower sense.[15]

Phenomenology can be roughly characterized as the study of conscious experience. As such, phenomenology studies objects not as they are in themselves (according to physics, material entities obeying physical laws) but rather *as they are experienced.* We can call the object as it experienced an "object of experience" or "experiential object."[16] An experiential object is anything that can appear to consciousness as a unified and coherent form. It can be something physical, like a table, chair, or person, or it can be something abstract, like a political or mathematical concept. If I see a tree, the tree is an object of my experience. If I think about ethnicity, ethnicity is an object of my experience. A person (including one's self) or group of people can also be objects in

Untitled-1 141  2/27/03, 3:51 PM



this sense—they are entities which can appear to consciousness as coherent unities of meaning.

Such unities of meaning are complex. I don't experience a shoe, for example, as a mere spatial form or a textured shape. It is true that part of my experience is of a spatial textured object, but in addition I see the shoes as things to be worn, which were bought at a store, produced in a factory, and so on through an indefinite range of social and practical meanings. Similarly, when I encounter a person I perceive more than a mere bodily form (or on the telephone an "acoustic blast"). That physical presence is embedded in a system of meanings which collectively inform my experience of that person: his or her age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, relation to me, and so forth.

Husserl's student Aron Gurwitsch characterized such experiential objects as "Gestalt systems" or "Gestalt contextures."[17] A Gestalt system is an interconnected unity of meaning whose parts only exist relative to the whole system. A person as perceived is a Gestalt system in that the constituent meanings which contribute to the experience of that person don't just aggregate together like pieces of a puzzle, but fuse into a structured whole.

Gestalt systems are independent from their wider environmental context but are structured according to that context.[18] I experience a person (including myself) as the same identical person at school, during an interview, or at a party. In Gestalt terms this corresponds to the "transferability" or "mobility" of a figure with respect to its ground. However, in each of these contexts a different aspect of the perceived person becomes salient. *Hapas* at Marshall experienced themselves and others largely with respect to social status at school, though in certain contests they would become more focused on ethnicity or physical appearance.

Within a Gestalt system we can distinguish thematic meanings from "silently effective" meanings. Thematic meanings correspond to what is focused or salient in the object of experience. In the Marshall context, for example, social clique tended to be thematic in the experience of self and others. On the other hand, silently effective meanings contribute to a Gestalt system as a whole (they are "effective only in an implicit fashion, silently, to speak with Merleau-Ponty, or in an anonymous way, to use a Husserlian expression."[19] For *Hapas* in the Marshall area, multiracilaity was silently effective in this sense. Their experience with Asian and multiethnic foods indicated that ethnic and multiethnic meanings were operative in their self experience, but their focus on social clique and their comments on ethnicity indicated that these meanings remained silent in most of their daily interactions.

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When implicit aspects of a Gestalt system are focused on, they are "disengaged" from the system as a whole and separately thematized.[20] In conversations about physical appearance, for example, or in response to the question "What are You?," one's ethnicity might be disengaged from the background of implicit meaning. Certainly in the context of the interviews I carried out, being mixed-race was thematic. What is interesting is that these were the exception cases, the occasional situation which solicited a focus on ethnicity.

This phenomenological analysis of context-dependence, where the organization of a Gestalt-system varies with situational context, is consistent with the recent literature on multiraciality. Amy Mass, for example, points out that "one of the most prominent variables affecting respondent's self-concepts was the geographic region in which they were raised."[21] She cites Hawaii and parts of Los Angeles as areas where multiracial Japanese experienced "few or no problems related to race." In other contexts multiracial experience was much more problematic. For example, those living in predominantly White communities in the midwest, or in Japan (with the exception of military bases) often recalled painful experiences of feeling "different," or even of "being taunted, chased, and beaten up." Research on mixed-race Asians in Hawaii, Vietnam, Latin America, and military bases in Japan also support the idea that the nature of mixed-race experience is dependent on environmental factors.

Although a general notion of context-dependence is implicit in the recent literature, no one has claimed that ethnic meaning can be "silently effective" in certain contexts. It is generally assumed that being mixed-race is something a subject thinks about, talks about, negotiates, or in general *deals with* on a day-to-day basis, for better or worse. In some models, the multiracial Asian is plagued by "cultural maladjustment, limited social assimilation, incomplete biological amalgamation, and pathological personality." In other cases, he or she is blessed with "insight and knowledge of two or more distinct and often antagonistic worlds, which enables him or her to lead the parent societies into transcending their differences."[22] What these models have in common is an emphasis on the explicit awareness of multiracial identity. That is, multiraciality is taken to be an *overtly* functional component of experience. By contrast, I have described multiraciality (within certain contexts, such as the Marshall area) as *implicitly* functional in the experience of self and others.

In describing multiracial aspects of experience as silently effective in the Marshall area, I don't mean to romanticize the neighborhood into an urban paradise. As Jeff Chang points out, such idealizations can

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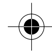

cover up patterns of oppression and marginalization.[23] Chang describes how, by taking race relations in Hawaii to be the "answer" to increasing racial tension on the mainland, Hawaii scholars overlooked underlying structures of colonial oppression. The Marshall area is by no means idyllic. Alcohol and drug abuse are pervasive (notice how many subjects made reference to "partying" above), as are robbery and violent crime, which may indicate underlying political and economic tensions. I have bracketed such issues in order to focus my phenomenological analyses, which have aimed to describe a specific kind of experience and explain it in terms of a situational/Gestalt-theoretical account of context-dependence.

Conclusion

In an early yearbook (circa 1930), Marshall's first principal concludes a pontification on self-reliance by quoting Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> The Mind is its own place,
> and in itself can create a Heaven of Hell,
> a Hell of Heaven

Fifty years later, the Marshall area contradicts Milton's wisdom. The mind is not its own place, but is deeply conditioned by the environment within which it is situated. The complex multiethnicity of the Marshall area between 1983 and 1992, discernible in its foodways, allowed ethnic experience to recede to a background of implicit yet constitutive meaning, such that *Hapas* in the area focused more on clique or social group in their daily interactions.

Notes

Thanks to Andrew Cross, Sojin Kim, Rebecca King, Steve M. Ropp, and David Woodruff Smith for commenting on drafts of this paper.

1. Stonequist (1937) described the marginal man as a person "poised in psychological uncertainty between two or more social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds," quoted in Christine Iijima Hall, "Please Choose One: Ethnic Identity Choices for Biracial Individuals" in Maria Root, editor, *Racially Mixed People in America* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1992, 250-251. For further discussion of marginal man theories see Cynthia Nakashima, "An Invisible Monster: The Creation and Denial of Mixed-Race People in America," same volume, 171-172 and Theresa Kay Williams, "Prism Lives: Identity of Binational Amerasians," same volume, 281-283.
2. *Hapa* is a Hawaiian term which refers to a person of partial Asian ancestry. Various controversies surround the term. Not only has *Hapa* historically had a pejorative connotation, but its use on the mainland, and in particular by groups such as *Hapa Issues Forum*, is considered by some a misappropriation of native Hawaiian culture. My use of the term *Hapa* is

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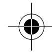
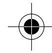
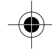


simply meant to reflect its usage in the Marshall environment. I, as well as most of those I interviewed, used the term regularly and without pejorative connotation. Moreover, the Hawaiian etymology of the term was rarely referenced, reflecting the fact that the word has acquired a life of its own within the local vocabulary. For discussion see "Editorial Comments" in *What's Hapa'ning* 3:2 (Summer 1995) and 3:3 (Winter 1995), and Lane Hirabayashi "On Being *Hapa*," *Pacific Citizen* (December 20, 1985).

3. School profile, 1987 (the first year such data is available). Since 1987, the ethnic composition of the school has changed. For the 1994-1995 school year, the student body was less than 2 percent African-American, 12 percent Asian, 65 percent Latino, 11 percent Filipino, and less than 10 percent White.
4. I here follow Peirce Lewis's "axiom of landscape as clue to culture," worth quoting in full: "The man-made landscape—the ordinary run-of-the-mill things that humans have created and put upon the earth—provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and are in the process of becoming. In other words, the culture of any nation [or area] is unintentionally reflected in its ordinary vernacular landscape." Quoted in "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," in J.B. Jackson et. al eds., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 15. Note that Lewis' axiom views landscape as offering a *clue* to culture, rather than absolute evidence. Even if such data doesn't rigorously establish underlying cultural structures, it does gesture towards them in a qualitatively significant way.
5. Sojin Kim and Somi Kim, "Typecast: Meaning, Culture, and Identity in the Alphabet Omelet (¿Which Came First?)" in Barbara Glauber, editor, *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the "Vernacular"* (New York: The Herb Lubelin Study Center of Design and Typography and the Cooper Union, 1993), 35.
6. Co-presence and convergence are evident across a variety of dimensions besides ethnicity. Income-levels, sexualities, linguistic practices, and perhaps most visibly, subcultural groups, also interact in the area. Indeed, it is not uncommon to see skaters, artists, gang members, intellectuals, recent immigrants, businessmen, and actors (as well as combinations of these) juxtaposed on a single street or within a single establishment.
7. This phenomenological inquiry asks how people *experience* themselves and others in daily life. Such analysis intersects with but is not equivalent to research into multiracial identity development or self-concept. The question of how phenomenological analyses relate to sociological and psychological analyses—and more to the point, what the relation is between the *experience* of self and others, the *concept* of self and others, and the *identity* of self and others—is beyond this article's scope.
8. The notion of a "lifeworld" derives from the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, and refers to the world as experienced in everyday activities and practices, as opposed to the world as described by science.
9. Of course "Anglo" itself denotes a variety of ethnic groups. I have suppressed this complexity except where the subject explicitly identified with a specific European ethnic group.



10. Interview guide available on request.
11. A further interesting aspect of the interviews is how markedly apolitical the discussions of ethnicity tended to be. Indeed, when I approached the subjects with the prospect of an interview about their ethnic heritage, many were surprised or even skeptical that this would be worth talking about. This attitude emerged vividly in an interview with Lih Russel and Sean McKean. While pressing Russel to concisely describe his thoughts on ethnicity, I asked him if he was proud of his background. He responded as follows: "I don't know if I want to go so far as 'proud.' I mean, that makes it almost seem like I'm out there holding a Eurasian pride flag in the air or something, you know, 'Eurasian Pride!' you know, go start a walk-a-thon or something. Come on Sean, you want to get it together? You too, Jeff, let's go start a little Eurasian Pride march."
12. Discussion with my sister also supported this possibility. For an illuminating study of a Los Angeles high school where the ethnic differentiation is more prominent, see Sarah Luck Pearson, "Hollywood High Confidential," *LA Weekly* 18:23 (May 3-9, 1996).
13. The subjects were also unanimously familiar with the characteristically mixed-race phenomenon of "passing" (as White, Latino, Asian, etc.) and had a wide-range of experiences (none of them negative) with this phenomenon.
14. To my knowledge, no major phenomenologist ever wrote an ethnography. This is regrettable, given the importance of testing abstract philosophical concepts against the pressures of their real-world application.
15. This section draws mainly on the phenomenological philosophies of Aron Gurwitsch and Martin Heidegger. Note that Gurwitsch and Heidegger are in many ways incompatible (given that Gurwitsch was a follower of Husserl while Heidegger was a critic), and that my bias is towards Gurwitsch's Husserlian orientation.
16. Husserl and Gurwitsch preferred the term "phenomenal object" or simply "phenomenon."
17. Gurwitsch is here using *Gestalt* psychology (*Gestalt* is German for "form") to supplement Husserlian phenomenology. His synthesis of the two theoretical frameworks is one of his fundamental contributions to philosophy.
18. It is this claim which unifies the Gurwitschean and Heideggerean phenomenologies. The notion that experiential objects are Gestalt unities of meaning whose constituents are only disengaged in special circumstances derives from the work of Aron Gurwitsch (see *The Field of Consciousness,* Duquesne: Duquesne University Press, 1964). The idea that human encounters are geared towards the needs and concerns of concrete situations derives from the work of Martin Heidegger (see *Being and Time*, Harper Collins, 1962, as well as Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
19. Aron Gurwitsch, "On Thematization," *Research in Phenomenology*, 1974, 37.
20. Strictly speaking, disengagement is an extreme case on a continuum from silently operative to thematic meanings. A constituent meaning of



Gestalt system can be more or less salient, but will tend to remain integrated into the system as a whole in most contexts. Only in extreme cases is the meaning totally disengaged from the system and transformed into a separate experiential object. Gurwitsch's theory of "disengaging thematization" (which draws heavily on Husserl's work) is meant to account for the phenomenology of mathematical and scientific practice, where the properties of a naturally encountered object are disengaged so that they can be used in abstract theorizing. In applying the notion of "disengaging thematization" to the experience of multiraciality, I am generalizing Gurwitsch's results from the case of mathematical and scientific experience to the case of multiracial experience.

21. Amy Mass, "Interracial Japanese Americans: The Best of Both Worlds or the End of the Japanese American Community?" in *Racially Mixed People in America,* 269.

22. Theresa Kay Williams, "Prism Lives: Identity of Binational Amerasians" in *Racially Mixed People in America*, 280-303; Kieu-Linh Caroline Valverde, "From Dust to Gold: The Vietnamese Amerasian Experience," *ibid*.,144-162; Steve M. Ropp, "Do Multiracial Subjects Really Challenge Race? Mixed-race Asians in the U.S. and Carribean," *Amerasia Journal* 23:1 (1997).

22. Described by Williams, 282.

23. Jeff Chang, "Local Knowledge(s): Notes on Race Relations, Panethnicity and History in Hawai'i," *Amerasia Journal* 22:2 (1996), 1-29.

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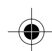

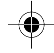

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