RESEARCH ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT This paper argues that some elements of material culture can creatively cross the line between notions of “nature” and “culture” as these and related ideas are often tacitly understood by some modern people. This has implications for the biosphere, but the division of these categories is also tied up with the division of people, processes of identification, memorialization, and the way some people are defined out of the human realm altogether. Modern material culture—objects used, left, manipulated, and removed by people—seems particularly adept at telling us about these categories in the minds of some modern people. An archaeology of the contemporary examines how people interact with different kinds of “natural” things in places where nature and culture, in the modern imaginary, meet and conflict. In the starkly different contexts of the city of Detroit and Yosemite National Park, such objects have been managed and manipulated in a way that speaks to crucial issues of memory, identity, and race. [*contemporary archaeology, nature and culture, memory, national parks, Detroit*]

RESUMEN Este artículo argumenta que algunos elementos de la cultura material pueden de manera creativa cruzar la línea entre las nociones de “naturaleza” y “cultura”, en la medida en que éstos e ideas relacionadas son a menudo entendidos tácitamente por algunas personas modernas. Esto tiene implicaciones para la biosfera, pero la división de estas categorías está también ligada a la división de las personas, los procesos de identificación, la memorialización, y a la manera como algunos individuos son definidos enteramente fuera de la esfera humana. La cultura material moderna—objetos usados, dejados, manipulados, y removidos por individuos—parece particularmente experta en contarnos acerca de estas categorías en las mentes de algunos individuos modernos. Una arqueología de lo contemporáneo examina cómo las personas interactúan con diferentes clases de cosas “naturales” en lugares donde la naturaleza y la cultura, en el imaginario moderno, se encuentran y entran en conflicto. En los contextos severamente diferentes de la ciudad de Detroit y Yosemite National Park, tales objetos han sido manejados y manipulados de una manera que habla sobre cuestiones cruciales de memoria, identidad, y raza. [*arqueología contemporánea*, *naturaleza y cultura, memoria, parques nacionales, Detroit]*

Understanding the contours of where modern people draw the line between nature and culture and seeing the ways in which this line is crossed or blurred has far-reaching implications for science, politics, and relations of power (Ellen 1996, 28). Any environmental action—any effort to “protect” or “restore” natural cycles, species, places, or processes—depends on the exact boundaries of what is defined in discourse as cultural and natural realms. The division of these categories is also tied up with divisions of people and the processes by which some are even defined out of the human realm altogether. These terms, which have been widely discussed in anthropology over the last few decades, must be revisited again since they continue to structure public discourse.

This paper argues that some elements of material culture can creatively cross the lines between notions of “nature,” “cultural,” “wild,” and “urban” as these and related ideas are often

tacitly understood by some modern people.[1] A contemporary archaeology examining how people interact with different kinds of things in places where nature and culture (in the modern imaginary) meet and conflict can speak to these contrasts and their differentiation in important ways. Modern material culture—objects used, left, manipulated, and removed by people—can reveal elements of private understandings and actions that structure public discussions. In turn, these have implications for anthropology, the biosphere, and for past and present dispossessions of people's land and resources. In the starkly different contexts of the city of Detroit and Yosemite National Park, we can trace similar practices of management and manipulation of things cast as natural to control memory and community.

This project began as an exploration of markings and modifications that seem linked to ideas of nature. In Yosemite, conceived by most—indeed labeled with official signs—as wilderness, some visitors have intentionally left traces and marks that archaeologists would recognize as artifacts and features: cultural interventions in the nonhuman world of the park. These include the creation of piles of carefully balanced stones, the manipulation of branches and rocks to form patterns, and the alteration of plants to make letters in a kind of "natural graffiti" similar to, but distinct from, that analyzed in other spaces. Observations of these manipulations in the wilderness prompted a reconsideration of the social place of natural things in urban spaces, such as Detroit, where postindustrial social processes have led to a reduction in population and in some ways the reassertion of the natural world. Some spaces have not been actively managed as expected, and plants have grown where they "do not belong." In these two settings, manipulations of objects seen as natural suggest ways that nature and culture are brought together and the supposedly clear line between them is tellingly both crossed and maintained. Far from being relegated to areas beyond the city limits, the concept of nature has a role in the creation of memory, community, and humanity in both of these contexts.

The discussion of these ideas is bound to be incomplete. Like all surveys of ongoing processes, these data were captured at a particular moment in time and incorporate the perspectives of only some who pass through or inhabit these places. Yet there is value in temporarily prioritizing the "stuff" of these cultural negotiations, which sits so silently that it can sometimes be lost in analysis. It is also true that the phenomena discussed here—piling of stones, clearing of brush—happen for many reasons, and there is no claim to characterize all such events. But explaining nature and culture in all contexts is a goal established as impossible long ago (see below). Rather, I highlight the role material things play in these very social negotiations, think through the way certain kinds of things have been manipulated and are themselves active in these two sites, and consider how this speaks to images of wilderness and urbanness and therefore to crucial issues of memory, identity, and race. In other words, this work aims to understand the observations made rather than make a claim for universality.

ARCHAEOLOGIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY

Archaeological evidence exists in a state of tension between individuals and collectivities. Each object recovered—Paleolithic point or Ford Transit van (Myers 2011)—has been molded, used, and discarded by individual human actions and not by "cultures" or "societies." Ancient thumbprints decorate pottery fragments, denoting a moment in the life of an individual certainly forgotten by that person almost instantly—just another crimp in another pot. Archaeological methodologies can focus our attention on these small-scale details and intimate, almost voyeuristic glimpses into private life (Buchli and Lucas 2001b; Cox 2001). If it is appropriate to write of "tradition" for a field as new as contemporary archaeology—the application of archaeological method and approaches to the present and very recent past—its traditional strengths have been in exploring the "hidden, forgotten, and abject qualities" of the world around us (Harrison and Schofield 2010, 1), often through such moments. It is personal (Doretti and Fondebrider 2001), and partly for that reason it has often been applied to creating more inclusive versions of the recent past by telling the stories of those excluded, marginalized, and alienated (Buchli and Lucas 2001b; De León 2012; Zimmerman and Welch 2011). In the tradition of historical archaeology (e.g., E. Scott 1994), contemporary archaeology tells stories, retrieves memories, and spotlights people who have slipped through the cracks of dominant narratives.

At the same time, archaeological evidence is collective and anonymous, lending itself to a different tack in the effort to make the familiar unfamiliar and therefore invite reexamination of the workings of the contemporary world (Graves-Brown 2000). Archaeological methods, including when applied to the contemporary, are also ways of gaining insight into larger-scale processes that have sedimented over time. Individuals are lost in this sea of past action, but broader patterns can emerge; while individual moments of life may be idiosyncratic, the patterned actions of many people offer a window into the normative. It is often on this larger scale that material things impact culture, shape the ground for our actions, and constrain practice. Things act as mediators constituting the social rather than just representing it (Latour 2000, 2005), a view fundamental to the now nearly four-decade-old postprocessual critique in archaeology. An archaeological evaluation of the present can speak to the unsaid—that which individuals might avoid speaking, that which hegemonic discourse obscures—and also to the related realm of the unsayable (Buchli and Lucas 2001a, 12). Modern material culture can show not just that which is overwritten by the dominant narrative but also the interior workings of that narrative itself.

The view of the processes and concepts analyzed here is necessarily partial—archaeological data is bound to be partial and fragmentary (González-Ruibal 2008, 251). Material culture does not "speak" unaided, and the most successful contemporary archaeologies have tacked back and forth between archaeological observations and ethnographic data, which will ultimately be vital to completing the present analysis (De León 2015; Gokee and De León 2014). In the present analysis of

dominant narratives, though, beginning with a focus on the material may be a useful initial move in recognizing the unsayable—here, how the concepts of nature and culture are deployed and manipulated and the implications of those manipulations. In other contexts, I have critiqued an approach to the archaeology of religion in periods with a surviving exegetic written record that often takes the shape of a comparison of action and a static version of religion inscribed in written documents (Chenoweth 2012, 2014). People's archaeologically recovered actions are measured against the "real" (i.e., written) religion, and they are found true or wanting. The presence of narrative explanations of action makes material culture seem secondary. Particularly when examining the dominant narrative itself, archaeologies of the contemporary could stand in similar danger. Insightful as it is, some of the earliest "garbology" work—in some ways the forerunner of contemporary archaeology—put archaeology in a similar "tattle tale" role, though it faulted "mental reality" and prioritized "material reality" (Rathje and Murphy 1992, 12–13). For at least three decades, it has been a central argument of much archaeological work that material things *work* in culture rather than merely reflecting or revealing it: things are active mediators, not just intermediaries (*sensu* Latour). A focus initially—though not exclusively—on material culture may allow for the close consideration of cairns and cut-away patches of moss to "make manifest" both the unsaid and the unsayable "without being trapped in a verbal discourse" (González-Ruibal 2008, 250–51).

DIVISIONS AND TRANSGRESSIONS OF NATURE/CULTURE

In many ways, parks like Yosemite are the inheritance of Enlightenment views in which supposedly wild, natural spaces "provided a contrasting category against which human identity could be defined as cultural rather than natural" (Oliver-Smith 2002, 30). Nature is available for literal appropriation, the *res nullius* of Locke (Meskell 2009, 103), but it also serves as a symbolically powerful Other to be both distinguished from and dominated. Modern cities take shape and meaning from this contrast in which nature is used both literally—the archaeological definition of urbanization usually involves the drawing of resources from a hinterland—and symbolically. Moreover, the process by which natural places are opposed to cultural ones also entails people, with some pressed into the "savage slot" as part of a long process of dispossession (Trouillot 2003). Nature, then, provides an Other to create a civilized self in several ways.

Anthropological and historical analyses have raised multiple objections to this dichotomy. One is that the places selected as national parks in the United States and elsewhere were home to many generations of peoples long before their boundaries were drawn and those occupants dispossessed, often on racial grounds (e.g., Crum 2002; Meskell 2009; Solnit 1994, 294–300). Poverty, too, has been the cause of dispossession of those not considered worthy of living on land some wished to be set aside as—or perhaps created into—wilderness (Horning 2002). The

dispossessed (or their descendants) are still present, of course, though the extent to which they are acknowledged varies considerably.

In another way, parks like Yosemite (Sellars 1997) and those elsewhere (e.g., Penrose 2007, 154–57) are certainly not untouched by human hands. They have been managed for visitors since their inception: animals and plants introduced or removed, roads and accommodations built, and so on. Writer Rebecca Solnit wryly describes her enjoyment in Yosemite of what she "at first took to be a pristine meadow. . . . The sprinklers should have been a clue. Before it was a pristine meadow, it was a golf course, and before that it was a cornfield. The cornfield, the golf course, and the meadow all reflect the changing expectations of the landscape, to produce, to entertain, to inspire" (1994, 249–50).

These previous residents and modern modifications are points to which we will return, but perhaps a broader (though not more essential) anthropological critique lies in the conceptions of nature and culture themselves. Roy Ellen sums up the consensus on these terms: "That nature is culturally construed and defined—even 'constructed'—has become commonplace in anthropology and the history of ideas. . . . Few would now dissent from the view that nature, and the extent to which it exists as a discrete idea at all, varies between different populations, according to different levels of discourse, and over time" (1996, 3). Mary Douglas was one of the first in anthropology to problematize the dichotomy. *The Nature of Things* (1975) sought to "see ourselves as things in nature," breaking down categorizations that place human beings outside of nature. Perhaps most famously, Marilyn Strathern, in *No Nature, No Culture*, argued that each of these terms is "a highly relativized concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics" and she critiques attempts to translate anthropologists' (Western) notions of this division into other cultures, there being "no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts" (1980, 177). That is, there is no agreed-upon, static, cross-cultural definition of these terms. Even the divisions of actor/object and human/nonhuman, which often undergird nature/culture, can be broken down on close examination (Latour 2005), and recent scholars have argued for a more complex view, as with the ontological analysis of Descola (2013), who holds such dichotomies to be ethnocentric.

And yet, for all their validity, these critiques may not have much of a place in the analysis of these ideas in the public imaginary. In another major American city, the tension between these forces suggests that, for most, the nature/culture divide remains very much real, even static, obvious, and fundamental. In her discussions of Hurricane Katrina's aftermath in New Orleans, Shannon Dawdy recognizes "the need for analysts to focus on the mutual construction of nature and culture," but points out that "this perspective is at an etic level" (2006, 723). On an emic level, she suggests that the levees that failed during Katrina were perceived by residents as a boundary marker between the natural, wild space of the water and the tamed, safe domain of culture: the city. This division was more fundamental than simply expecting the levees to hold (which, she suggests, many did not expect at all). She identifies an anxiety about the separateness of natural and cultural places and even animals (wild versus pet) running through the Katrina disaster and the debate over recovery, and notes that "few seem willing to concede that nature has won part of the battle" and allow

some areas of the city to be given over to nature as parks and wetlands (723–24). Much the same could be said about Detroit, though with a slower-moving form of invasion of natural things into the cultural world. In any case, the division from nature still seems central to ideas of culture and the American city.

The nature/culture divide has darker modern applications as well. Jason De Léon (2015) points out that the naturalness of the Sonoran desert is highlighted and constructed in such a way as to take the blame for the deaths of undocumented migrants who move through it, despite the substantial involvement of the (very cultural) will of governmental bodies. The distinction of wild, natural space and denial of its culturedness (and thus controllability) is key to the shifting of blame for these deaths. He studies the archaeological traces of migrant journeys, revealing voices hidden by structural inequalities but also noting "cleanup" efforts in which migrant objects deemed to be out-of-place "trash" are removed from the desert. De Léon sees this process as serving both to erase the acts of structural violence committed against migrants and to cast migrants themselves as causing "an environmental blight" by their presence (201). In terms developed more below, migrants and their possessions are cast as cultural intrusions in a natural place, which is then given the blame for violence against them. Again, the nature/culture distinction is alive and well in public discourse.

Intimate and Sedimented Experiences of Nature/Culture

If the division of nature and culture continues in the public imaginary despite anthropological critique, the boundaries of this division and manner of conflicts across it will matter greatly for public discussions of the environment and climate change. As J. Peter Brosius writes, "anthropology has a critical role to play not only in contributing to our understanding of the human impact on the physical and biotic environment but also in showing how that environment is constructed, represented, claimed, and contested" (1999, 277). That is, what we do to the world as a species has both cultural and physical aspects: those wishing to stop environmental destruction must be clear on what all participants mean by "environment" and "destruction." As in the case of De León's work, just noted, there are also direct implications for these ideas in the cultural realm. Ideas of race, representation, and belonging run through seemingly neutral notions of the natural, sometimes with life-and-death consequences (see also Crum 2002; Meskell 2009). There are inner workings to the social constructions of nature and culture that need to be "made manifest" and whose implications need to be considered. In two strikingly and intentionally different contexts, we can examine and trace possible implications of moments when individuals use natural things for their own ends, altering their experiences of space, identity, and memory.

Yosemite

Set aside as a state park in 1864 and established as the third US National Park in 1890, Yosemite consists of 1,169 square miles of the Sierra Mountains centering on the famous walls of Yosemite Valley. While neither the largest nor technically the oldest US National Park, Yosemite is the one perhaps most associated with a vision of unaltered nature and is the most well-known example of the perceived wilderness of the American West. Yosemite came to be "the heart . . . of American nature" and "central to the conception of American nature" very quickly after the Civil War (Deverell 2006, 10–11).

Just over four million people visited Yosemite in 2014 (National Park Service n.d.). Proportions of US and international visitors vary from study to study, but US residents make up between about 75 and 90 percent of those who visit, with the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Germany, Korea, and Taiwan being substantial sources of international visitors (Blotkamp et al. 2010; Le et al. 2008; National Park Service n.d.). It should be noted that those who visit Yosemite Valley are not precisely the same group who take the trails into the designated "wilderness" portion of the park. Only 20 to 50 percent of the visitors in the surveys just cited responded that "hiking" made up part of their visit, and in one study (Blotkamp et al. 2010, 42), only 5 percent reported visiting the "Yosemite wilderness," although it is unclear if this was interpreted by respondents as leaving the valley on a marked trail, entering the area technically defined as wilderness by law (which is relatively common), or as hiking entirely off the trails or into the "high country" (which is less common). Yosemite visitors are thus diverse, and this diversity goes beyond simple demographics. As Sally Ann Ness points out, experiences of Yosemite (and probably other park spaces) are individualized; despite the "seemingly inescapable" character of the "national discourse of conserved wilderness [this discourse] failed to register as a significant element of the environment encountered" for some of her interlocutors (2011, 83).

This project takes up this discourse of the wild, albeit with a different approach, and explores the way it registers on some visitors as well as the way ideas of preservation and intervention are negotiated. As an entry point, in 2012, a three-day survey noted and photographed alterations made by visitors in various parts of the park, particularly those areas labeled with park signage and on maps as "wilderness." It should be noted that the goal here is not to define how all people at all times experienced these places, particularly considering the diversity just mentioned. The goal is to think through how objects cast as natural and cultural are differently deployed, in the process redefining those realms and speaking to negotiations of identity, race, Othering, and the declaration of self.

Assembling Reverse Mementos

Bjørnar Olsen notes that "solid things last, they convey the past to us, make it gather. Without their persistency, the past would be gone, memories lost" (2013, 215). Tourist sites like Yosemite sell souvenirs (French: *souvenir*, remembrance, recollection, memory) by the million each year for this reason. This section details another physical element to memory: a trace left behind after a visit rather than something taken along, which is no less a part of the process of memorialization. Visitors to Yosemite are entreated by park authorities to "leave no trace," but this dictum is not heeded on a number of levels. Some of these traces are unintentional, but others seem quite the opposite. Visitors pile a series of stones on top of one another to make small cairns or balance them into unlikely piles; they assemble found objects and modify small living plants. In this section, I will suggest that on a personal scale, these commemorate visitors passing by, declaring their identity and maintaining a presence for them in the park, much like the graffiti. In the next section, however, I argue that on the scale of the sedimented collective, the materials selected for these modifications allow them to become, for those visitors who assemble such mementos, *non*-modifications of natural spaces. They are not recognized (by some) as cultural creations, but might be termed "natural graffiti."

In Yosemite, there are places where people have created stone piles in a practical effort to mark a trail in difficult to follow areas. Yet, in other contexts, the piles do not seem to have a practical function, perched on the edge of clearly marked paths or on the tops of large boulders (Figure 1, top). Some of these alterations appear to have been the work of individual visitors, while others more likely were unplanned yet communal efforts, where initial moves were copied by later passersby. Accretions of objects in unlikely places, such as a hollowed tree trunk filled with stones (Figure 1, center), may well represent this type of activity. A single visitor may have placed the first stone, followed by others who joined the project of remaking and marking the space in a manner reminiscent of the tradition in Judaism and other cultures of leaving a stone on a grave to mark a visit. Each subsequent addition thus represents a mark of a person's passage as well as an individual moment of agreement—assenting that such an action is permissible—and a collective construction of what is acceptable cultural action in this natural place. Material traces create the ground for future action by inviting similar acts.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Even more explicit are a subset of markings that are akin to more familiar graffiti: letters carved into downed trees or cut through moss or lichen growing on boulders. Figure 1 (bottom right) shows a prominent boulder near Yosemite's Mist Trail, one of the most popular in the valley, with names and initials cut into a layer of moss. The markings are many and overlapping, with varying degrees of

regrowth, suggesting that this has been a long-standing practice among visitors. It is notable that the more traditional carving of names and initials into wood (Figure 1, bottom left) seems to be almost exclusively practiced on downed, dead wood rather than on living trees. Names act as symbols—they represent without any necessary connection or resemblance between the letters of a name and the person to which they refer—but all of these physical markings and pilings are directly connected to the passing of a person who made them. They index presence in the original semiotic sense (Lyons 1995, 15), here calling attention to (indicating) the copresence of the creator of the mark and the place in which it was made. Most letters made in this way formed only initials, not messages, tags, or full names, and so the use of a symbolic personal identifier seems secondary to the indexical marking itself.

Graffiti is often cast as subversive (Harrison and Schofield 2010, 191) and "oppositional" to society (Kramer 2010), but the literature agrees that there are significant exceptions (e.g., Oliver and Neal 2010b). Graffiti can indicate very strong feelings about a place and the groups that inhabit it (Orengo and Robinson 2008, 277). The markings encountered in Yosemite seem to fall under the banner of "public graffiti." Often composed of initials and names, public graffiti can be seen as "announcements of one's identity, a kind of testimonial to one's existence in a world of anonymity," or simply "leav[ing] one's mark," a record of having passed through a place (Abel and Buckley 1977, 16). The pilings of stone can be seen to accomplish this in much the same way, providing a material record that the creator has passed through, leaving a piece of her- or himself behind: a memorial. Even the letter markings tend to be more anonymous than much traditional graffiti, with no repeating "tags" noted in the wilderness area of the park and few names. In both cases, the indexicality of the markings, pointing to the passing of the visitor, seems to be key.

It is in contemporary archaeology that this view of memorialization and identity through markings and objects receives extended treatment. For instance, Owen has suggested that personal marks left in pilgrimage and other sacred locations in Medieval Europe "represent . . . an individual's desire to maintain a presence within a holy space" (2010, 41). In the starkly different environment of prisons, Eleanor Conlin Casella (2009) has noted how such marks can be seen as statements of identity and "testimonies" to one's existence. Memorialization takes place through the mundane as much as the gigantic (Hart and Winter 2001, 87), and on this intimate scale of rocks and moss we can see these marks in Yosemite as a kind of "reverse memento" for the visitors who travel there. While a memento or souvenir is an object taken by an individual from a site of memory, these are left behind. In a sense similar to that in Owen's study, they allow creators to maintain a presence in the park even after the trip has ended by publicly announcing and leaving behind a trace of one's identity. At the same time, as seen in Conlin Casella's work, identity is reinforced—here, an identity as cultured. As noted above, the experience and appreciation of wild nature are vital to seeing oneself as "civilized," and the memorialization of that experience with a material testimony helps it persist. As more traditional graffiti may proclaim identity by confronting authority, natural graffiti does so by confronting nature. Yet, as the next section argues, a direct intervention in nature would be counterproductive, and so these proclamations and confrontations are carefully crafted.

Natural Graffiti

Though there are similarities, there are also significant ways in which natural graffiti departs from traditional graffiti. Propositional content—through which graffiti is often seen to constitute a rejection of societal norms and values—besides very basic identifiers have already been noted as largely absent in Yosemite's wilderness. Moreover, these markings seem to be carefully controlled and limited by those who make them. Patterns observed in the survey suggest that some visitors felt comfortable making marks in downed wood, but not generally in upright, living trees, perhaps the most obvious and available canvas in the park and commonly carved elsewhere (Mallea-Olaetxe 2010; Oliver and Neal 2010a). Another difference with traditional graffiti is in the materials used. Graffiti in public places is in no sense unusual, but in the Yosemite wilderness and on the trails there was a lack of the traditional tools of the graffiti artist—spray paint and permanent marker—though they would have been more lasting and often more easily laid down. Marks were made, instead, with dead wood, stone, and smaller-scale living plants, such as moss inscriptions.

Certainly, if the goal were only to leave a permanent mark—to create a permanent reverse memento—spray paint would work better than a pile of stones. Importantly, although piles of stones are easily dispersed, I am not suggesting that the impermanence of these marks is what made them seem acceptable to those who made them. Cuttings in the moss on the boulder take years to grow back and can only be actively removed by park authorities with further damage to the moss itself. Initials in downed trees may rot away with the tree, but this, too, is a long-term alteration to the Yosemite landscape. Rather, I suggest that it is the materials chosen that seem to separate these marks from traditional graffiti. Interestingly, the main exception to the trend of letters forming only initials was on a metal sign at the entrance to the designated wilderness area, at the start of a trail leading out of the valley (Figure 2). This sign also had more traditional graffiti "tags" made with permanent marker and stickers prepared in advance, showing that such tools were available and that some were inclined to use them. Yet, no instance of those same marks was recorded on the ample canvas of granite walls or trees surveyed on this trail. The sign itself was perhaps already a cultural imposition, making it seem an appropriate place for such unnatural markings.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

"Leaving a mark" is only part of the goal, for if visitors' marks intervene in the mark-makers' ideas of nature and give themselves away as cultural, then they damage that which their memento is designed to continue: an experience of the park understood as natural and, by extension, the marker's own identity in the cultural realm. Perfect culture requires perfect nature. Ness (2011, 77) observes that rock climbers in Yosemite often connect their climbing experiences to ideas about the conquest of nature, harkening back to the role of nature as Other discussed above. Such a conquest,

then, also marks the identity of the conqueror as cultured (as well as connecting to a web of signs too complex to enter into here, particularly about masculinity). However, it would be counterproductive for a climber to conquer the rock face of the famous El Capitan peak by bolting a metal and plastic ladder to its face. The conquest must be done in a way that is compatible with nature in order to preserve the naturalness, the Otherness, of what is conquered.

Manipulations of stone, wood, and plant life, even if they create what might well be classed as unnatural constructions—what archaeologists would call clearly cultural features or artifacts—are seen in some important sense as being a part of nature by those who make them. These marks are distinguished from spray paint and permanent marker, which were not identified on objects or in areas read as natural. Their reading as natural allows them to occupy a space between noninterference with nature, on the one hand, and marking it for remembrance and identification as cultural, on the other. Visitors can leave their mark on a place seen as natural, paradoxically, without leaving their mark on nature.

I noted above that only some visitors would characterize "natural graffiti" as a nonmodification of a natural space. A recent Facebook post (August 18, 2016) by officials at Zion National Park brings this point home, as it enjoined visitors against precisely this kind of marking through the piling of stones. By mid-November, the post had been shared almost 8,500 times and received almost 10,000 reactions, some in support but many opposed. The top comment (in Facebook's ranking), receiving almost 900 "likes," railed against efforts of parks and park rangers to control visitors' actions in the parks altogether, rather than being for or against such constructions. Another, receiving almost 200 "likes," supported rock stacking as a form of meditation, and many commenters pointed out the use of such piles for trail marking (although, as with the data presented here, the Zion post did not imply that such practical marks were the focus, showing an image of dozens of adjacent cairns collected in a streambed rather than marking a path). A post receiving 400 "likes" was one of several that argued that any impact of such cairns was minimal compared to the presence of visitors themselves, since cairns did not impact nature as much as hikers. A full analysis of this discourse is beyond the scope of this article, but the fact that Zion authorities felt the need to make the argument that "rock graffiti" is "not natural" speaks to the contested and polysemous nature of these marks. That so many who follow Zion's postings took issue with this post suggests that, for many visitors, these are a different kind of intervention in the park landscape, if an intervention at all.

At the same time, it is worth noting—particularly given the discussion of race and identity below—that while all of these mementos are violations of the "leave no trace" policy, prosecutions for them are exceedingly rare (with a well-publicized exception noted below). Several studies from 2005 to 2009 consistently found that 88 percent of visitors identified themselves as "white" (Blotkamp et al. 2010, 14; Le et al. 2008, 98) and their travel to the park suggests that most had enough disposable income to not be classed as impoverished. In a summer 2009 survey, the average person spent $242 at or near the park, and nearly a quarter of groups reported spending over $1000 on their trips (Blotkamp et al. 2010, 76). It is not possible, from the data available here, to draw a conclusion about the acceptability of these violations (their reading by some as nonviolations) and

these racial and economic identifications, but the role of racial identification and class politics in the reading of acceptable action in natural spaces is certainly an area for further consideration.

Culturing Plants in Detroit

Though a thoroughly cultural city, parts of Detroit are sometimes oddly natural places, where normally trimmed plants can grow to surprising heights, run to seed, and die without human intervention. Over the past seven decades, the city has lost more than one million residents. Some of those who remain have been unable to pay their taxes due to limited economic, educational, and transit opportunities, among other issues, leading the city to repossess tens of thousands of properties, which it can neither maintain nor sell. The result is a large number of properties that have been vacant for years. On some streets, the manicured lawns of occupied houses make for stark contrasts with those that have not seen management of the plant growth in many years. When funds have been available, the city has torn down thousands of empty structures, turning large parts of some blocks into open fields.

This discussion does not mean to reify the false image of Detroit as a "blank slate" (Stovall and Hill 2016, 119), a racially charged *res nullius* on which a new city can be built. Rather, my goal is to examine further some of the causes and implications of that false image, which continues to circulate. Despite the many instances we can etically identify when the categorizations of nature and culture are not clearly separable—when, in fact, they are deeply entwined—when they are perceived as breaking down, the result can be uncomfortable for many (Dove 1992, 246–47). As in Dawdy's New Orleans, I suggest that one concern (among many) in the discourse about Detroit is discomfort with the blurring of the lines between nature and culture shown to be so important in Yosemite.

Perhaps the best way to understand what people feel is out of place or unsettled about an area is to look at what precisely they do when they try to "fix" it. A concrete result of this reading can be seen in "cleanup" efforts undertaken by individuals and community groups. Such events are frequent in Detroit and are sponsored by a variety of organizations that hope to improve conditions in the city. This commentary should not be read as a critique of these well-intentioned, often important efforts. Rather, the actions of residents and volunteer groups as they modify vacant land and abandoned properties offer a window into what participants see as the line between nature and culture through the "right" way to organize the space of the city. In many of these events, in addition to collecting old tires and Styrofoam litter, modifications to plant life are the subject of considerable effort.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In the late summer of 2014, I observed a handwritten sign on West Chicago Avenue in the western part of Detroit that read simply: “Mow your neighbor’s lawn.” Though most likely intended to encourage community collaboration and cooperation, it is informative that the topic of action was the lawn. Many volunteers work to improve life in Detroit in many ways, but one popular means of contributing is the active management of lawns, vacant lots, parks, and open spaces. Individuals cut the grass of properties abandoned on the streets where they live. On a larger scale, weekend “mower brigades” of volunteers, some with professional riding mowers, descend on abandoned blocks or city-owned parks and cut grass that has often grown to a substantial height. Some of these efforts are informal—neighbors of abandoned properties simply managing adjacent lawns or assisting elderly or disabled neighbors with yard-maintenance tasks—but others are much more formal, with regular meetings, sponsors, and even websites.

This work is continuous, but is perhaps best seen in large-scale events. Figure 3 shows before and after images of two houses in a western neighborhood of Detroit taken during a cleanup effort in August 2014 sponsored by the organization Life Remodeled. The bottom set of photos of the same house is particularly striking. In Detroit, with its great surplus of housing, it is unlikely that the buildings maintained in this work will ever be occupied permanently again. Abandoned buildings are often damaged by “scrappers” and the elements due to a lack of maintenance, they may be considered small and outdated, and other structures in better condition are available, making it not currently economically worthwhile to repair many houses like these. And yet participants in cleanup events put a surprising amount of time into making the houses look occupied through the management of plants and obscuring signs of decay.

In Yosemite, the creation of reverse mementos was seen by some as being compatible with the natural world because of the materials involved, allowing visitors to leave a mark of their passage but not disrupt nature with unnatural additions. In Detroit, this same reading of plant matter as being part of the natural realm marks these unkempt areas as being problematic: unmowed grasses and untrimmed bushes are natural things where they do not belong. In a highly controlled form, hints of the natural are allowed in urban spaces in the form of parks and lawns. Just as zoos fence in wild animals, plants are acceptable when managed, demarcated, and culturally patterned. These elements of nature have been conquered, appropriated from the *res nullius,* and made a tame Other. Plants in cultural areas must be kept under control, submitting to appropriation by the cultural, or else, as in Detroit’s lawns and parks, they become matter out of place—Mary Douglas’s ([1966] 1984) definition of “dirt.” The correct relationship between natural and cultural things in Detroit was off when these plants were unchecked, and what was needed—shown by the actions of cleanup crews and mower brigades—was the restoration of cultural control of these natural objects.

Memory is at issue in Detroit as well. An empty house with an unmown lawn is indexically tied to abandonment: it is a reminder of communities shrinking. It acts unintentionally as a memorial, a reminder of past occupation, which, through a tension with “how things used to be,”

materializes that loss. A vacant, ruined house is a monument not in the sense of something constructed in order to retain memory, but something which comes to be and therefore manifests a loss that some may wish to deny. Memory is used to sustain communities (Wilkie 2001), but in cleanup efforts in Detroit we see the construction of community through a forgetting, or perhaps more properly a denial of memorialization. Memorialization implies loss; to keep something from being lost, one can refuse to let a memory of it be constructed. Importantly, the emptiness of the house is itself produced, in part, through the natural processes of decay and plant growth, both of which are expected to be checked in this cultural place. If the destruction of objects is a forgetting, their maintenance in the face of natural processes of decay and overgrowth—the continued denial of nature in a cultural place—is a refusal of the loss. The maintained house is kept from indexing its emptiness. One can neither remember nor forget something that is being maintained. At the same time, this reassertion of culture in the trimming of plants reaffirms cultural identity through the distinction of nature/culture, park/city: Detroit is not a wilderness, and its citizens are not wild.

RACE, IDENTITY, AND UNINTENDED MEMORIES

The natural material out of place in the lawns of Detroit mars the cultural city just as spray paint would mar Yosemite's granite walls. Abandonment creates things read as natural that ought to be absent in Detroit, while naturalness makes some objects appropriate for memorialization without intrusion in the park. This memory of consumption of nature in a visit to Yosemite constructs the self as cultural and the denial of memorialization through culturing plants in the city reasserts control over the wild Other. All of these actions are the more powerful for their physicality: these memories are "habit memories" that grow from bodily practices and lasting material objects (Olsen 2013, 209–10). The persistence of materiality resists erasure, and so we can construct needed memories by constructing or setting aside objects (Hart and Winter 2001). While memorials are usually conceived as being intentional and active, objects of memory can, in a sense, have their own agendas, and memory can be involuntary (Pétursdóttir and Olsen 2014, 9–12; see also Olsen 2013). The same materiality that gives objects of memory their persistence and strength also gives them independence and underdetermination, which means that they often do more than intended.

This last section noted the implications for identification of the reading of naturalness in the materials observed in this study, which go far beyond maintenance of family trips or even communities. In the differentiation of actions and materials as natural and cultural, we reinscribe and reexperience the dichotomy that produces the city and the civilized. Yet, this dichotomy does more than simply define the bounds of human and nonhuman space: it is entailed with defining some people out of the realm of humanness altogether. In both Yosemite and Detroit, objects read as natural have implications for memory making, which tie them to broader issues of identification and race.

There is ambiguity in the evidence here, particularly in Detroit. Multiple groups with widely divergent histories contribute to the construction of the archaeological records noted here—comparatively wealthy, mainly white suburban mower brigades are not the same as most Detroit residents, who are largely less wealthy people of color, including many recent immigrants. Both groups are involved in the active management of the city. Ties between racial stereotypes and natural forces and places are long-standing—after all, the civilized "West" is constituted, in part, by people read as natural "savages." All considerations of nature run the risk of repopulating Trouillot's "savage slot," particularly in cityscapes associated with African Americans, a traditional Other on the inside (Trouillot 2003, 14–15, 17). The reassertion of culture through plant management and arresting processes of decay could be read as a counter to a depiction of decline and wildness, with city residents actively redefining their position as Other as they redefine the space around them back to cultural. Thus, the savage slot is rejected along with the "jungle" trope: this is a city, not a jungle. Certainly, Detroit's residents are not passive in this process.

On the other hand, by their very presence, the largely suburban, largely white mower gangs make a claim on the city and its need for them, which could be read as part of a false narrative of whiteness "saving" Detroit (Stovall and Hill 2016). Before and after pictures of cleanup work, including those presented here, could be cast as evidence of how far from cultural the city has fallen, highlighting the discomfort of continuing decay and reaffirming the savageness of the place. The savage slot of Trouillot would thus be reaffirmed around an urban/suburban dichotomy. Ethnographic work is needed to more fully understand the question of nature and culture in the contemporary imaginary, their roles in these contexts, and the charged nature of the negotiation as it pertains to imaginations of race in the Detroit area. Yet neither of these readings will be deemed "correct" and each may obtain at times. Again, material culture is powerful in memorialization not only because it sustains but also because it is underdetermined; it may both memorialize a city lost to the jungle and assert that city as cultural to stop a community from becoming a memory at the same time. My purpose here is to point to some of the ways these claims and counterclaims may be made, often unintentionally, through materials read as natural.

On the personal scale, in order to maintain the dichotomy of nature/culture and thus identity in Yosemite, the material construction of memory needs to be masked through the choice of natural objects to create memories of visits. Mementos of visitors' presence in the park were created, but idealized nature was preserved because the graffiti memorials were natural ones. If instead one was to construct a cultural place of remembrance within the natural world, it would mar the perfection of nature against which identity is defined as perfectly cultured. Would there be anything more absurd than a glass and chrome monument to nature in Yosemite's wilderness? But this memorialization of/through nature is itself the construction of a forgetting on a much broader scale. The naturalness of the memorial in Yosemite allows it to be a purely natural place, an ideally natural Other to create an ideally civilized self. But, of course, as noted above, this vision exists in tension with a much more complex history: Yosemite is not, and has not been for thousands of years, an ideally natural place untouched by human hands. For this image to be created, the previous residents have to be forcefully ejected and forgotten.

The process by which Yosemite came to symbolize and enact ideal nature in American consciousness is the same by which its earlier Ahwahneechee inhabitants came to be dispossessed, assigned as Other, and have their humanity questioned. "As they popularized Yosemite as a symbol and destination, early artists also positioned the valley's Native inhabitants as exotic decorations, establishing a dynamic between visitors and Native people that would exist for decades to come . . . in the Yosemite envisioned by painters and photographers, the region's Native population is cast aside, relegated most often to the corners of pictures as decorations in an otherwise 'untouched' wilderness; in this Yosemite, Indians inhabit the valley without affecting it, and they exist primarily for the viewing pleasure of whites" (A. Scott 2006, 3). This dispossession has perhaps most eloquently been written about by Rebecca Solnit: "Yosemite has been defined in terms of geological time scales and natural wonders; it has become easy to believe that Yosemite has no significant human history" (1994, 230). Yet she details that history, and the dispossession of Native peoples in Yosemite that are not part of the park's usual memories or memorializations, even though they continued up into the 1960s (288). The view of Native peoples is "either very hostile—that Native peoples don't constitute a human presence—or very idolizing—that they lived in such utter harmony that they had no effect on their surroundings at all, but either way they don't count" (295).

The "noble savage" trope receives an unlikely encore in the ways some visitors create reverse mementos, and it is not coincidental that the same materials used in these constructions are those by which Native peoples molded and modified their land for many centuries: stone and plant turned into basketry, housing, storage structures, tools, and much more. The reading of these same materials as noninterventions, which allows memorialization without the modification of nature, has the side effect of also making Native material culture *noncultural* and thus Native presence a nonmemory. As noted above, the vast majority of Yosemite visitors self-identify as "white," and as little as 1 percent identify as Native American (Blotkamp et al. 2010, 14), which places these readings squarely in the context of present-day racialization. A false image of Native peoples having no effect on their world is reinforced in the majority white visitors' imagination of themselves as cultured and the "unaltered" Yosemite (and its stones, moss, and rotting branches) as wild. The supposed naturalness reading of stone and wood and moss also reads the valley's past inhabitants out of history, allowing them to be denied memorialization as cultural: they made no ("real") markings, no habit memories to resist erasure and stake a claim of possession for their descendants, because their things were merely natural. This version of history is false, but the unintended consequences of conceptions of the line between nature and culture reinforce it, nonetheless.

CONCLUSION

In the fall of 2014, hiking websites such as Calipidder.com and ModernHiker.com reported on an artist using acrylic paints to create representational images on stones and canyon walls in several US National Parks, including Yosemite. Most published images were of human heads, often with

technology-evoking hashtags, and the creator posted pictures of her work online with the tag "creepytings." Public outcry against the images was intense as the story went viral. In an online news article, a spokesperson for Yosemite is quoted as noting that cases of "vandalism" in Yosemite occurred, but were "not common," and that this case was unique in being so widespread (Gorman 2014). In June 2016 the artist pled guilty to defacing national parks in federal court. As shown above, visitors to parks clearly modify them and leave marks constantly, intentionally and unintentionally, and parks have been managed and occupied throughout their histories (Sellars 1997), yet objections to these markings and memorializations do not seem to rise to the level of a crime—"vandalism" is reported to be "not common." For the artist now facing legal proceedings, it seems probable that one key difference was the choice of acrylic paint and representational images as opposed to materials seen as natural and modifications with minimal propositional content. As the discussion surrounding Zion National Park's posting about "rock graffiti" shows, some modifications are much more equivocal. There are more- and less-acceptable means of marking one's passage in the wild spaces of the park and creating reverse mementos. It is ironic that the same understandings that mark certain actions as criminal tend also, as discussed in the last section, to erase the much more horrific dispossession of Native peoples.

As people move through places—natural or cultural—they use material culture to adapt them to their own uses and to create and communicate their identities, communities, and memories. This fact is fundamental to archaeology, and has been for decades, but examining this process in the present is arguably just becoming seen as a worthwhile endeavor. Material culture is inherently polysemous, and this study does not claim to speak for all visitors to Yosemite or all inhabitants of Detroit, let alone to characterize the meaning that pilings of stone or carefully manicured lawns must always have. Rather, in the particular contexts considered, objects that creatively straddle the line between nature and culture seem particularly adept at telling us about the categories of nature and culture in the minds of some modern people and the implications of how the lines between them are drawn.

In Yosemite, the choice of materials used in the marking of visitors' passing allows the marks to be seen as part of the natural realm while still serving the cultural purpose of proclaiming identity, indexing and thus remembering a presence. At the same time, the view of such materials as noninterventions erases the valley's past occupants, putting their material world outside the realm of the human. In Detroit, the uncontrolled nature of the plants on abandoned properties makes a mockery of suburban-style landscaping and highlights a process of abandonment. If the city of Detroit is allowed to become "overgrown," hope for its recovery seems to fade, and its status as a city is questioned. Management and removal of plants—often to bare ground if necessary—is seen as an important step in "cleaning" and recovery for the city: a reordering and reculturing of the space. In both cases, the line between nature and culture is manipulated in the service of human memory and the creation of identity. Things read as natural serve as a way to remember presences, create forgettings, and undo absences. At the same time, the material aspects of these memorials give them the power to make other, probably less intentional statements: implicit arguments about the naturalness—the savageness—of other people, past and present. In both the urban and the

wild, consideration of how people use material objects to properly order the world around them reveals as much about our identities and understandings in the present—as civilized, as cultured, or simply as existing—as the study of house floors and site layouts reveal about the distant past. The question of what is natural and what is cultural gains special relevance as well as special complications for those living in the Anthropocene.

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NOTES

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[1] As the complexity, ambiguity, and constructedness of "nature," "culture," and related terms and ideas are at the heart of the discussion for this paper, it seems redundant to place them in quotes in every instance where their meaning is being considered in what follows.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. “Natural graffiti” in Yosemite National Park, 2012. (Photographs by author)

Figure 2. A metal sign with incised and inked markings at the entrance to a trail out of the Yosemite Valley. (Photograph by author)

Figure 3. Before and after images of “cleanup” work accomplished by volunteers at the Life Remodeled event in Detroit, August 2014. (Photographs by Komal Patel)