In the haze: on narrativization and air pollution in Shanghai

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Abstract

This paper explores psychic experiences of air pollution and the ways these become narrated in various texts, especially but not exclusively those responding to one weekend in December 2013 when Shanghai purportedly experienced the highest levels of fine-particle, or PM2.5, pollution on record. This paper is also concerned, more generally, with processes associated with attempts to transform the messiness, or figurative haze, of fieldwork into an authoritative written account. These dual concerns—with air pollution and writing—are mutually informing since both seem to translate troubling, and often socially unacceptable, emotions into more presentable, and tolerable, forms. Through narrativization, namely acts of authorship and inscription, persons implicated in this paper, attempt to relieve, figuratively "write over", or otherwise repress anxieties. While it is understandable, and perhaps even "normal" to perpetuate such processes, this paper argues we should engage, rather than erase, (with) them since they not only animate persons and texts but also illuminate efforts to understand human responses to air pollution.

Keywords: China, air pollution, narrativization, edifying / systematic accounts

Introduction

In recent years, English-language media reports in the UK and US about air pollution in China have proliferated so much they have become almost routine. These consistently confront audiences with not only an "oft-cited litany of statistics" (Wang 2012: 115) but also apocalyptic images of shadows silhouetted against indistinct, depopulated, cityscapes. Such signifying accounts of the nightmarish disruptions to urban China as a consequence of the so-called "airpocalypse" (see, for example, Kaiman 2013) resemble those constructed during SARS, if only in the sense that cities appear to have "ground to a halt"; "no people are to be seen", and yet *still* they breed news (Wang 2004: 591). The circumstances and persons to which these texts refer are communicated to audiences already having been, as Walter Benjamin observed of information some eighty years ago, "shot through with explanation" (1968: 89). Consequently, these accounts possess qualities of compactness and monologic certainty.[1] Air pollution appears, in short, like a social fact[2] which must either be endured by stoic, unknowing "victims" who would, apparently, do something if only they could or resisted by indignant, even violent, types. Such disparate figures coalesce, congealing in unambiguous texts.

"'Sometimes I feel like a lab-rat in this environment [Beijing],' says Xiaoxia. 'I'm doing the most I can to make sure I breathe clean air, but if you want to stay in this city, you have to endure the environment – there is no way

out'" (Yuan Ren 2014).

"Feelings of resigned helplessness have given way to fear, anger, and society-wide pressure to change the status quo" (Kaiman 2013).

"Over 1,000 police … guarded the city government office compound … two police officers were dragged into the crowd … and punched and beaten … The outpouring of public anger is emblematic of the rising discontent facing Chinese leaders, who are obsessed with maintaining stability and struggling to balance growth with rising public anger over environmental threats" (NBC 2012).

Such accounts eliminate the tensions existing not only between but also within persons, so they appear as abstracted emotional states, torn from the fabric of everyday life. The profound, and complicated existential struggles associated with living in highly polluted environments are, thereby, obscured. Instead, the stock characters, or "talking heads", in these texts—introduced as, for example, "one concerned Weibo[3] user"; "one ... user fumed" and so on (see, for example, Phillips 2015)—appear like those "fully centred", "unified" Enlightenment subjects to whom Stuart Hall refers who are "endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action" (1992: 275). Meanwhile, causality and order is imagined (and perhaps projected) upon an entanglement of emotions—fear, anxiety, anger and so on—in ways that produce clearly demarcated roles (e.g. "victims" and "villains"). Consequently, air pollution becomes, whether consciously or otherwise, a plot device, or entailment, within already inscribed narratives

circulating within "western media"[4] of a society that is "full of anger" (see, for example, Zheng 2012: 28); or a chapter in a lengthier "story of unfinished revolution" (Li and Lee 2013: 834).[5]

Chinese air pollution has also come increasingly under the gaze of media elsewhere in the world such as in Japan.[6] According to Glenn Hook, Ra Mason and Paul O'Shea, China's environmental "risk" has long been "portrayed as not only environmental, but somehow deeper, potentially affecting Japanese national identity" although, in claims which might resonate with those of this article, coverage has become "far more emotional and rhetorical and the issue has played into the conventional China threat narrative" (2015: 52). In China, meanwhile, coverage seems hazier. Even though, as Steven Andrews observes, mobile apps and websites providing air quality information have multiplied, these seem to engender confusion as, for example, the same air quality values are measured differently by American and Chinese reporting systems (2014).[7] Many of the aforementioned elements—air pollution, illness, anger, reservations, protests and so on—also appear in academic accounts (see, for example, Su and Link 2013). These recognize ambivalence[8] whilst also registering how factors like "fear of repression, opportunity structures and dependence on polluting industries shape not only action but also the ... ways ... risks are conceptualized", thereby complicating the connection between "awareness of pollution and action to stop it" (Lora-Wainwright 2013a: 244).[9] Brian Tilt's work, for example, draws upon ethnographic research in an industrial township in rural Sichuan

and explores "how community members understand ... linkages between ... pollution ... and ... health and well-being" (2013: 283). While Tilt found that "exposure to environmental health hazards was woven into the fabric of everyday life" (2013: 286), he recognizes that "people may feel ambivalent about pollution sources that play an important role in the political economy", not least because they "rely heavily on chemical inputs to produce market-quality vegetables and earn a cash income" (2013: 291).

It is in such a context that this article seeks to explore psychic responses to air pollution and the ways in which these are narrativized, or made into an account or story, especially but not exclusively those responding to one weekend in December 2013 when Shanghai purportedly experienced the highest levels of pollution on record, albeit only since spring 2012 when readings were altered to include PM2.5, a measurement for minute-particle pollution. Significant reference is made to my own fieldnotes, generated by virtue of being in Shanghai at the time, or what anthropologists call participant observation; messages sent while there; posts placed upon weixin 微信 (WeChat, a mobile voice and video messaging service); and articles appearing in such publications as *The Guardian*. This article also refers to accounts produced through subsequently conducted semi-structured interviews with, and written responses elicited from, persons residing in Shanghai, some of whom I had encountered informally during that weekend in 2013. Such communications, and the narratives they

produced, sometimes took place through weixin and focused upon feelings, and attitudes, toward air pollution, ideas about what should be done and what, if anything, was done to cope with, or manage, it.[10] Although this article intends to destabilize systematic, totalizing and unambiguous explanations, no attempt is made either to separate "fact" and "fiction" or construct an account of how persons *really* feel about air pollution. Instead, all persons implicated in this article—myself included—are seen as engaging in narrativization, or what Nelson Goodman calls "worldmaking", processes which involve "taking apart and putting together ... dividing wholes into parts ... combining features ... making connections" (1978: 7). The products emerging from such machinations might, accordingly, be regarded as "rhetorical performances", determined, in one way or another, "by the need to tell a good story",[11] to oneself and to others. More specifically, this article explores how "people concerned with air … turn the diffuse into something substantive" (Choy 2012: 129). Such processes attempt to transform, as Cheryl Mattingly notes regarding Aristotle's insights into narrative, "the noise and incidentalness of everyday life into a compacted causal argument (a plot) in which one thing after another ... [becomes] one thing *because* of another" (1998: 45, emphasis added). These accounts are not, therefore, transparent and neutral reflections of underlying emotional states. Instead, they are fabricated from the confused, confusing and crooked contours of everyday life and the emotions circulating therein. While this article identifies and explores numerous, intermingling, emotions—anger, resignation, and so on—anxiety is pervasive.

Traces of it are evident in not only other ostensibly different emotional states but also the authorial voice evident in this text. Although anxieties are primarily associated with experiences of air pollution, paralleling these are those relating to the indeterminacy or figurative fog and haze of fieldwork and efforts to render this within written forms. Admittedly, anxieties relating to composing ethnography are part of the epistemological bind every ethnographer faces. They are, therefore, typically removed, or figuratively "written over", through narrativization, namely acts of authorship and inscription. This is often done to protect texts from contamination from what is sometimes construed as benign forms of reflexivity or, even worse, narcissistic "navel-gazing" (Finlay 2002: 215). [12] Such anxieties are also seemingly "written over", vanished or projected in everyday life, as persons strive to get by and through the world. While much of this *is* removed from this version of the article, some is preserved on the basis that it constitutes a resource which can, in intention if not outcome, not only enrich ethnography but also, and especially, texts intent upon exploring human responses to air pollution. It is, in short, vital to recognize that humans contain "multitudes" even though, as Renee Lertzman notes citing Walt Whitman, this is "consistently overlooked", "possibly split off" or denied in texts intent upon understanding what people "*really* think" about climate or environmental threats (2013: 120, emphasis added).

The first part of this article which aspires to be "edifying" (Rorty 1979: 368) is "distrustful of

the notion of essences and dubious about claims that reality can … accurately, holistically, singularly, disinterestedly, be explained and described" (Rapport 1997: 190-191). Seeking to be descriptive rather than explanatory, I narrate my efforts to engage with "phenomena *in themselves*" [my italics] (Finlay 2008: 29). Admittedly, some readers might find this display of reflexivity excessive and although it is intended that personal revelation be "a springboard for ... general insight" rather than as an end in itself (Finlay 2002: 215) it is ultimately for readers to determine whether or not such ambitions have been realized. Specifically, presentation of my own "interior landscape" is intended, albeit only implicitly, to inform, in one way or another, how other persons appearing in this article are contemplated; characters who are imagined and constructed from words and other observable forms of emotionality. It is, accordingly, important to be wary of projection, both of personal feelings and cultural perspectives, which might, if left unchecked, impose identity upon, or between, self and others. The second part of this article strives to remedy the indeterminacy permeating the first, with a "systematic account" (Rorty 1979) of the themes which, as Loren Barritt *et al* note with regard to their analysis of written texts, "fly up like sparks" from informants'[13] commentary (1984: 6). Although this article concludes by arguing anxieties enhance rather than damage ethnographies, especially those seeking to illuminate upon human responses to environmental degradation, it is, perhaps, best to suggest "truth" be read not only between, rather than within, my "edifying" and "systematic" accounts but also those produced by other persons implicated in this article,

namely journalists and residents.

An Edifying Account or "the Crooked Timber of Humanity"[14]

Clifford Geertz explains how questions relating to "authorial presence" have "haunted ethnography", albeit in disguised forms,[15] highlighting the "clash" between "the expository conventions of author-saturated ... and ... author-evacuated" texts (1988: 9). While recognizing authorial presence might cast doubt on the objectivity of the investigator, the paragraphs below proceed nonetheless, for reasons I elaborate upon further when concluding this article. Initially my intention had been to "describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy, *before* it is subject to theoretical elaboration or conceptual schematizing" (Jackson 1996: 2, emphasis added). However, such ambitions have been unrealized not least because, as Mattingly claims, "experience already has in it the seeds of narrative" (1998: 45): even before it has been made to fit into the subheadings below.

Experience-Narrative

That lived experience, as Michael Jackson observes, "incorporates and fuses immediate sensory experience with pregiven cultural knowledge" (1996: 42) can be exemplified through a somewhat uncomfortable encounter with a man I shall call Wang whom I met while accompanying my wife to a high-school reunion. Prior to meeting him, my wife feared he and

I would not get on and yet, nevertheless, told me details that *made* this true in the sense that words, as Foucault has claimed, can "form the objects of which they speak" (1969 [2002]: 54).

He is "rich and successful", she explained, before elucidating upon her classmates' view of him as "arrogant". Our encounter was, in short, shaped by this short introduction—I did find he displayed overconfidence—but also the discourse of agenda-setters like *The Washington Post* which claimed, for example, "middle class Chinese, once obsessed purely with economic gains, are outraged about the quality of life" and "are angry enough to step forward" (Mufson 2015).

Admittedly Wang's narrative, introduced during dinner and later elaborated in messages on *weixin*, punctured this discourse and was, therefore, troubling, in the sense associated with the work of Mary Douglas, to whom I refer below (1966). "Pollution is an inevitable result of industrialization", he surmised, "and unfortunately we met it. It was like this in other countries, but we are at this stage now while they have already been through it. The outside environment [i.e. other countries, the economic system] doesn't allow us to change industry immediately".

Such commentary could, nevertheless (as I subsequently realized), be *made* to make sense when seen in conjunction with academic discourses claiming opportunity structures mediate attitudes toward pollution (see, for example, Deng and Yang 2013). This hastened me to read, and construct, Wang *as if* he *was* the role of banker, and facilitated a story with him clearly positioned within.

Such a confluence, or figurative knot, of pre-existing knowledge and experiences coalesce in perspectives. These are neither natural (but partly co-constructed through social interaction) nor necessarily reliable even though they predispose ways of seeing and thinking about reality. Perspectives, as Joel Charon observes, "*force* us to pull out certain stimuli from our environment and to ... ignore other stimuli" (2010: 4, emphasis added). Perspectives, sometimes, form so tight and inflexible a prism that contrary information is *made* to fit within (rather than change) an already established ideation. When Wang later used literary language (e.g. tongxin jishou 痛心疾首 (to grieve and lament)) to explain his feelings about pollution, for example, I clung to the frame into which I had inserted him, interpreting it as a display of "impression management" (Goffman 1959 [1990]). It is not, therefore, merely the words of others, as I later explain, which "write over" experiences but also those we concoct ourselves.

While lived-experience and pre-given knowledge become embroiled in the production of understanding so they are supplemented by powerful, rhetorical, mediated texts. Prior to going to Shanghai I had, for example, become preoccupied by a picture in *The Guardian* of an elderly man wearing a flat cap (Associated Press 2013)[16] whose gait, or hexis, is hunched—communicating submissiveness—as he flies a kite on the Bund—connoting stoic acceptance and perhaps resilience—in ways which make him reproduce long-standing stereotypes.[17] Meanwhile, the skyscrapers in Pudong—signifiers of development—are barely visible with the

wumai 雾霾 (smog, haze) obscuring both the material products and discourses of development. These images, the words deployed—Airpocalypse is a case in point, the made up term deployed by journalists to refer to China's pollution—and the narratives they make are both arresting and intelligible. Consequently, one imitates, albeit unknowingly, perhaps because they magic the unruliness of experience, and "the field", into something more coherent. Even my *weixin* posts that weekend, as well as unposted images taken with the camera function of my phone, often of barely visible architectural forms, later seemed quotations, or homages, to those in journalistic media. My fieldnotes, meanwhile, written during 2014, included frequent descriptions of anger, witnessed in parks, convenience stores, street corners and so on. Such aforementioned narratives also sensitized me to notice some commentary on weixin— multiplying at such speeds that it forms a corpus of words that must frustrate even the most quantitatively inclined researcher. For example, one quotation which loomed large in the story I was, and still am, trying to tell was the message below, re-posted numerous times upon weixin during that weekend.

"Strongly appealing, we request a government spokesperson to explain the serious air pollution. They should provide a detailed plan about how to manage the Shanghai environment, specifying aims and time limits for the situation to be improved. Every task should have a named supervisor and the public should be allowed to monitor this. Any misconduct or negligence should be punished heavily and strictly. [To residents] Shanghai needs your

support. Fellow Shanghainese, please pass on this message. Unity is power, move your fingers [to re-post message], let's pass on our wishes."

Specifically, these narratives predisposed me to see signifiers of Chinese society as "full of anger" and a "crisis of belief" such as that described during SARS when "Dancing ... banqueting ... disappeared from the city ... worry ... written on ... faces ... a time without joy or celebration" (Wang 2004: 596, 595). Even though the field looked differently to me—I had an ordinary working weekend punctuated by social engagements—these narratives wielded power, seeming to have the capacity to bend data—or write over incommensurability—so that they became insinuated into those already inscribed versions of reality which my ethnography seemed intent upon reproducing, if only perhaps unwittingly. [18] They also obscured commentary which did not fit or seemed "matter out of place" and which was, therefore, polluting to what Douglas calls the human "yearning for rigidity" and longing "for hard lines and clear concepts" (1966: 163). Luo, for example, is in her late-30s, and works in foreign trade. She and her husband who works in finance, and the commentary they produced, seemed to thwart my efforts to narrativize informants' experiences, making them susceptible to exclusion from this article. "The problem is too big", she said in a seemingly matter-of-fact manner. "I wouldn't say I don't care", she explained, "but I wouldn't make a big fuss either", although she later conceded, "I guess sometimes I feel a bit worried". She nevertheless

appeared relaxed about how to manage air pollution. "I don't deal with it", she said, "I am danran 淡然 (indifferent). I never even wear a mask".

Multivoicedness

Erasing persons like Luo may realize commensurable, and often consoling, accounts of fieldwork. However, the on-going, iterative and prolonged nature of ethnography invariably means "the field" continues to produce complicated, and seemingly contrary, meanings. Even messages sent back-and-forth on weixin during one day in December 2013, of which the following are but merely the tip of a figurative iceberg, thwart simplistic narratives about living in highly polluted environments. The first records capacities to eat—commonly recognized as a sign of good health—while the second and third resemble that "'we're completely fucked' response" which Mary-Jane Rust claims "is … another layer of the defence system, which gives ... license to give up thinking" (2008: 10-11, cited in Dodds 2011: 70). Concerns for food and sleep, nevertheless, separate such persons from the melancholic described by Freud who *cannot* eat or sleep (1917: 246).

"Eating pizza on my day off, I can't go out due to pollution"

"There are only two things online today: 1. Mandela is dead. 2. We will also soon be (dead)"

"I got up to pee and was nearly scared to death. It is good I have a dog. Now I can use it as a guide dog when I go out"

Although ostensibly innocuous, these messages, like Luo's commentary, suggest multivoicedness, namely a multiplicity of dynamic, interacting, voices (see, for example, Aveling *et al* 2015: 670) which appear to be produced by persons who are plural, and multiple, rather than those decidedly singular, or unitary, persons introduced at the start of this article. Even that previously cited fragment of Wang's commentary was, as Nigel Rapport puts it elsewhere, shot through with "concomitantly antithetical messages; each … open to contradictory interpretations" (1997: 184), namely not only a "pollute first, clean up later discourse" but also an official discourse of development as a linear path and undoubtedly many more: and voices only continue to proliferate. Despite not getting on, Wang and I embarrassedly exchanged contact details and this meant I could view his *weixin* posts. These revealed more versions of Wang, or "Tony" as I came to know him. Each morning during an entire month, for example, he placed screen shots of PM2.5 levels. Several months later he visited Hong Kong and I was obliged, so my wife said, to invite him for dinner to thank him for "helping with my project". Perhaps eager to ensure we got on better than previously, my wife provided further information about Tony, telling me of moments of pain as well as more salacious and in fact

quite funny details about his life. By the time we met again, I no longer saw him as a banker, although this facet of his identity was fore-grounded in *my experience of him* during the meal when he talked with somebody in finance. Instead, I saw him as a multitude of roles: a single-parent, a father attempting to give his son a good trip, a classmate, and so on. Factors were conspiring against him, however, such as when his son dirtied his pants twice at Ocean Park—the reason for their visit—compelling them to leave after only an hour having brought only one spare pair. Such details had the effect of, as Linda Finlay puts it in another context, yanking me into his life world (2008: 19). Instead of viewing Wang with disdain or ethnographic detachment—as I had previously—I felt compassion and this was, apparently, conducive to being open to his experiences. However, while providing respite from ethnographic anxieties, this neither helped my endeavors to understand Wang nor produce a coherent account as I became consumed by questions regarding empathy (see, for example, Hollan 2008: 476) and the troubling notion that my increasingly sympathetic response to him might partly be addressed to myself as his deficiencies in fatherhood resonated with my own. The only consolation I could later muster was from Max Van Manen who asserts that things "turn very fuzzy" just when they seem to "become so clear" (1990: 41) although it felt like I was clutching at straws.

Living with Voices

Prior to going to Shanghai, my wife and I had known about "dangerous levels of air pollution" (Associated Press 2013) and that:

"Children, the elderly and the sick were advised to remain at home, while others were told to reduce their outdoor activities … Building and road construction work was halted … Most inbound flights were cancelled and more than 50 flights diverted at Shanghai Pudong International Airport." (Chen 2013)

As we discussed the risks, especially to our then young daughter, we vacillated about whether or not to go. My wife seemed conflicted, expressing guilt at going while nevertheless seeming reluctant not to go, while I said I had no choice given a pre-arranged work commitment, mooting the idea that I travel alone even while composing emails to supervisors suggesting the trip be cancelled and imagining how an alternate weekend might be experienced. In such seemingly mundane circumstances, we were acting out Hall's lucid and compelling claim that persons are composed of "contradictory identities, pulling in different directions" (1992: 277). As we spoke, using different voices, to various facets of each other and others (as I later explain), or at least our imagination of them (as well as ourselves) we sought to navigate a world "already constituted, but also never completely constituted"; feeling "acted upon" and yet "open to an infinite number of possibilities" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 453). In such circumstances, we produced a comforting story, or "narrative of the self" (Hall 1990) to tell

about ourselves to ourselves, as well as not only each other but also others, significant and generalized. More specifically, we went to Shanghai and were even surprised when upon arrival at the airport, delays were announced—even though I had read about them—indicating denial and what is called "motivated forgetting" which, according to psychologists, relates to repression. Put simply, in order to accommodate proliferating voices, we wrote, or spoke, over some of them, erasing, extracting, and simplifying; practices which resemble Goodman's account of world making (1978: 7). Consequently, we went to Shanghai as planned and subsequently I have constructed a narrative that has "forgotten" other, perhaps nefarious, reasons for going, namely because I *wanted* to, even while, like the insistently communicative melancholic to whom Sigmund Freud refers, reproaching, vilifying and abasing myself before everyone and seeming to find "satisfaction in self-exposure" (1917: 246, 247).

Such struggles, which mirror those in writing—for example, between edifying and systematic, author-saturated and author-evacuated accounts of reality, etc.—result in commensurable versions of ourselves, such as that I communicated to students in an email that weekend:

Hope you are both well. The pollution here is incredible. In all the time I've been in China, I've never seen anything like this. I'm not sure of my plan yet. I'd intended to talk to some people about research but I might come back earlier. I'll email once I know what is happening.

Illustrating Harvey Sacks' provocative claim that in "every" moment of talk, people are "experiencing and producing their cultures ... roles ... personalities" (Moerman 1988: xi), this email exaggerates, draws attention to the time I had been in China and presents myself as busily engaged in academic endeavors. The final line seems to conjure immediacy, like a television continuity announcer seeking to encourage audiences to stay tuned. In communications with family, meanwhile, I expressed concern about my daughter. To supervisors who had arranged the trip I emphasized the health hazards associated with being in the city, conceivably *presenting myself as a victim of circumstances they had created*. These versions might be regarded as manifestations of what symbolic interactionists call impression management, although this should not necessarily imply there was an essential, relatively fixed, *true* psychic state composing these performances. Instead, we concoct certain accounts of ourselves and the situations in which we are implicated. These realize fantasies of coherent identities so that consequently we might appear to others—and perhaps even ourselves—like those Enlightenment folk referred to at the start of this article. Nevertheless, as we are bewitched by fabricated versions of ourselves, we mistake "abstraction for concrete realities" (Whitehead 1925: 56): committing "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead 1925: 52). In so doing, we "lose all sense of the abundance and plenitude of life" (Jackson 1996: 7). We also fail to acknowledge that behind "fronts" are persons "steeped in contradictions":

"environmentalists who are ... frequent flyers" (Berliner 2016: 2, 1), those who "want cheap flights and ... to prevent a global catastrophe" (Lertzman 2013) and Wang who grieves about air pollution while driving around downtown Shanghai in a BMW.

A Systematic Account or Psychology 2.0

"Shouldn't we now return to sanity from all this mad proliferation of worlds?" (Goodman 1978: 20)

The paragraphs below seek to disperse the indeterminacy—or clear the air—pervading the first part of this article. Such a project parallels those tactics, or what psychoanalysts call defence mechanisms, deployed by persons to cope with anxieties related to living in a highly polluted environment. Specifically, I identify four efforts of mental control featuring in accounts of air pollution. These are not discrete but overlap, as is indicated by the presence of the same persons under more than one heading.

Intellectualization

Although Freud did not use the term "intellectualization", his work explored how intellectual functions are used for the purpose of defence. The emergence of sophisticated "popular" and "lay" epidemiologies (Lora-Wainwright 2013b: 304-305)[19] are, perhaps, illustrative of such interrelated processes. These and voracious efforts to measure PM2.5 using downloaded apps seem intent upon translating "unruly affects" into ideas which "can be dealt with in

consciousness" (Freud 1946: 178). Intellectualization manifests in individualized tactics deployed "to protect their ... bodies", resembling those identified by Anna Lora-Wainwright in a rural context (2013a: 247). Qiu, for example, who seemed fatalistic (as I discuss below) nevertheless talked about ziwo baohu 自我保护 (self-protection), elaborating upon air purifiers and masks she had purchased to achieve such ends. Such tactics can be seen in the context of what Judith Farquhar and Zhang Qicheng claim is a "growing popular enthusiasm for 'self-health' ... activities ... classified under ... *yangsheng*" (2012: 16), 养生 (caring for life "in cultured, deliberate, and creative ways" (2012: 14)). While *yangsheng* does not, typically, relate to shopping (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 236), commercial products are used to "to craft ... times ... spaces … situation and environment" (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 237). In this regard, persons like Qiu resemble those in Kunming who "respond to … health threats through … shopping rather than ... putting pressure on the state to improve regulation" (Klein 2013: 249). Given Farquhar and Zhang also use yangsheng to refer to persons "willing to assess the results of … daily activities and adjust … practice accordingly" (2012: 237), yangsheng might also encompass activities like laji fenlei 垃圾分类 (garbage separation), planting trees, recycling, checking pollution measuring devices, walking and cycling rather than driving, as well as the purchasing of products—activities my informants mentioned.

Intellectualization through yangsheng seems intent upon removing persons, either physically

or emotionally, and sometimes both, from stressful events. Nevertheless, in contrast to yangsheng which, as Farquhar and Zhang observe, allows persons to "escape without leaving" (2012: 22), tactics responding to air pollution appeared of "limited effectiveness", as they had for persons to whom Lora-Wainwright refers (2013a: 250). Chen, a female who runs her own business, seemed especially pained by the environment she found herself in. "When I look out of the window", she said, "I only have one idea in my head—the end of the world is coming". While conceding she could gain some protection by blocking the outside world, even this did not result in particularly satisfactory outcomes. "You just sit inside", she said, "you close the doors and turn on the air purifier but you look at the hundun 混沌 (chaos) outside and can't help feeling suffocated. You still feel afraid". So intense were these feelings that some concluded self-protection could only be realized by leaving the city entirely. Zhou works in a multinational company and is financially comfortable, owning a home and car while frequently journeying overseas. Nevertheless, she, like other purportedly elite persons, seeks self-protection "by looking abroad" (Su and Link 2013: 230), talking frequently with her husband about immigrating to New Zealand. However, after listing the benefits of life outside China, Zhou's tone shifted. "I don't know", she said, "maybe life would be too quiet. Restaurants would close early. We would have to eat at home most of the time. Shanghai is not all bad". That Zhou can imagine, and contemplate, life overseas not only gives her agency but also illustrates how attitudes toward, and experiences of, air pollution are mediated by "wider

opportunity structures", or "patterns of dependency", even if the circumstances of Zhou's life are different to those rural persons to whom Lora-Wainwright refers (2013b: 315).

The limited success of efforts to intellectualize, namely turn feelings—anxieties and so on—into thoughts was further indicated by frequent references to emotions, and feelings. According to Joanna Macy, emotions like terror, rage and guilt coalesce in "environmental despair" as persons confront "so vast and final a loss" which "brings sadness beyond the telling" (1995: 241, cited in Dodds 2011: 100). As they combine in Macy's definition so they joined in commentary provided by Wang's former classmate who, in only one sentence, referred to qifen 气愤 (fury), tongxin 痛心 (pain) and zhaoji 着急 (anxiety) although anxiety pervaded many accounts. Li, a single and self-employed mother in her early 40s, talked of the increasing frequency of wumai days. "When it isn't a sunny day", she explained, "I feel a lump in my throat as I walk around", before discussing respiratory diseases and lung cancer in ways that unequivocally suggested unease. Her febrile, almost desperate, efforts to obtain medical insurance further indicated persistent anxiety although admittedly these might have been assuaged once she had purchased this. However, despite such tactics deployed to prevent anxieties, commentary was punctuated by references to fears, worries and afflictions even if these were, partly, only imagined, as they were, thankfully, for Li who, as far as I know, remains in good health. Consequently, Song, a male in his early-40s who by virtue of his work is the

most official of my informants, was not unusual when, like those in rural contexts, he spoke of a diminished, or inadequate, life (Lora-Wainwright 2013b) "There is no point even talking about life quality", he explained with the world-weariness of a cynic.

Splitting and Projection

Individuals and groups may seek protection from painful or threatening internal conflicts by splitting their feelings into different elements. Such a process is often accompanied by projection, whereby problematic, or intolerable, feelings are located outside, or in other individuals and groups.[20] Qiu, for example, who works in recruitment, stated "government should be proactive", suggesting heavy polluting factories should be closed or "moved to pianyuan 偏远 (remote and faraway) areas in a manner which seemed to imply desires for both geographical and psychological distance between her and the problem. In this regard, her words seemed intent upon maintaining, and fortifying, lines between her and "the problem", i.e. pollution, in ways that might usefully be seen in conjunction with her previously mentioned purchases of air humidifiers and so on. Qiu's narrative more resembles "localized", or "not-in-my-backyard" discourse than it does "'not-in-anybody's-backyard' (NIABY) activism, whereby citizens adopt a more 'general concern' view of the problem rather than a parochial, localized one" (Johnson 2013). Nevertheless, efforts to vanish pollution were often thwarted by the sensory details associated with air pollution, namely "the haze in the air that makes

people choke and cough" (Tilt 2013: 284). This increasingly insinuates itself into Shanghai

detached from signifiers like factory chimneys and so on in ways which seem to thwart efforts

to attain distance from the problem. For example, when Chen referred to the period in 2013

when PM2.5 levels were especially high, part of her unease was because she had only

previously seen such serious air pollution on the news and even then not in Shanghai but in

Beijing. Now it had occurred in Shanghai, her description of the city as being *lunxian*, or

"occupied" and "falling into enemy hands" seemed pertinent.

Seemingly more successful were narratives categorizing persons implicated in pollution into

clear categories, namely "victims" and "villains", the latter of which include persons like

businesspersons and government officials who are ascribed with qualities like immorality,

corruption and greed. These construct a clear "geography of blame" (Farmer 1992) through

what psychoanalysts refer to as splitting, such as between "good citizens" and "evil developers".

Such clearly delineated characters occupy *it's not my fault* narratives which might be seen as

"neurotic defences against depressive anxiety (difficulty in acknowledging human culpability

and guilt)" (Dodds 2011: 44). One such text was a music video which though relating to Beijing

circulated on *weixin* amongst my contacts over the weekend of December 7, 2013 although it

had previously, as I later discovered, been cited in *The Guardian* (Kaiman 2013), thereby giving

this article, as well as specific texts herein, further intertextuality. Set against a monochrome

background, the video which I shall call *The Great Fog*[21] highlights what Douglas refers to as

the "disharmony of ends" (1966: 140) which individuals and societies are in pursuit and

critiques the social, economic and political structures that perpetuate pollution while at the

same time increasing distances between victims and perpetrators.

"The visibility is only 200 meters

Just like the distance between the property developer and the regulatory bodies

People ask each other and think how to solve the problem of environment pollution

Who is emphasizing development, only caring about the short-term profits?

Who is mining (exploiting) crazily, and not caring about the problems left behind?

Who is boasting happiness, but neglecting governance?"

Another such text was a documentary made by Chai Jing, a former state television journalist,

entitled *Under the Dome*,[22] which criticized state-owned energy companies, steel producers

and coal factories and revealed the inability of the Ministry of Environmental Protection to act

against big polluters. The film was viewed 150 million times within three days of its release

(according to *Wikipedia*) and by many of my informants. Although the film received mixed

reviews, I was captivated by the anger—for want of a better word—Chai received online as a

consequence of matters like her decision to construct a narrative around her then unborn

daughter's tumor. Although Chai attributed this to air pollution, persons suggested this could be because Chai smoked rather than poor air quality. On *Sohu*, for example, one post was divided into two parts, the first addressed to readers, the second to Chai herself. Referring to Chai as shabi 傻逼 (stupid cunt), the narrator distanced writer and reader from Chai referring to her as renjia 人家 (that person, a person or persons other than the speaker and hearer). Meanwhile, the post emphasized Chai's positionality as an American, or an outsider. The post claimed she ate too much, a term widely understood to mean she is bored, i.e. has not much to do, the implication being this motivated her to produce the text. The writer then sarcastically referred to Chai's "good heart", saying she had come back from America to tell people the "wumai wuran yanzhongle 雾霾污染严重了 ("the haze, pollution is serious") and to "look after their bodies". Transitioning into the second part of the post, the writer deployed a further vulgarity, namely shadiao 傻鸟 (silly dick), before commenting: "You went to America and live really well. If China had an earthquake would you come back to China to tell people there's an earthquake", the implication being that pollution is obvious, i.e. ordinary people did not need (or want) Chai to remind them.

My labelling of this account as "angry" and my decision to not only preserve it in this article but also discuss it at length might indicate the continued impact of the previously mentioned Chinese society is "full of anger" discourse. Such a response to Chai is, perhaps, suggestive of

fenqing 愤青 (angry youth), namely persons who are extremely vocal with their nationalism and who often display anti-Western tendencies. It is, nevertheless, possible to read this "anger" as relating to more complex psychic processes. Chai, in contrast to *The Great Fog*, unequivocally makes claims on people, even demanding audiences define their stance toward the issue as well as suggesting *their* actions contribute to pollution. This not only casts doubt upon the "*it is not my / our fault*" narrative (to which I later refer) but also articulates a reverse-narrative, stating that "*it is my / our fault*" and, crucially, "*there is something we can do about it*". Although such a narrative recognizes the problem and offers opportunities for reparation, Chai blurs boundaries between "victims" and "villains" in ways which might, feasibly, thwart efforts to split, project or, as I later explain, deny leading persons to respond by, for example, "blaming the ecological messenger" (Dodds 2011: 52). In contrast, *The Great Fog* might be read as a lament (see, for example, Briggs 2014: 317) or "imagist poem" that addresses audiences as if they "were currently sharing these experiences with the performers" (Briggs 2014: 318) which, of course, many are. Crucially, the sorrowful lyrics, images of persons wearing masks in conjunction with the soundtrack and other technical codes aestheticize while keeping lines between "victims" and "villains" clearly drawn.

Denial

Ethnographic studies conducted in rural areas emphasize how although aware of the dangers

of industrialization, persons felt "powerless to oppose them" (Lora-Wainwright 2013a: 247;

Tilt 2013: 294). Indeed, villagers' comments cited by Tilt—which "summed up the sentiments

of many", e.g. "there's nothing that common people can do. We just take what comes" (2013:

294)—were repeated almost verbatim in interview transcripts and written commentary. In fact,

the most frequently used terms were mei banfa 没办法 and wunai 无奈, terms which can be

translated as "one cannot do anything about it" and "without choice", "for lack of better options"

and "helplessness" respectively. Such terms ostensibly indicate deficiencies in agency and a

"sense of fatalism", like that expressed by many villagers in Sichuan (Tilt 2013: 294). Qiu, for

example, is a capable, resourceful and informed female in her mid-thirties. After having

acknowledged the seriousness of pollution, she elaborated upon how this influenced her health

in a manner that revealed a sophisticated epidemiology. Nevertheless, she appeared

unambiguously fatalistic. "I feel wunai", she said succinctly. Chen, meanwhile, talked of her

wuli gan 无力感 (feeling of powerlessness). "Nobody can do anything", said somebody else.

However, these terms can also be read as efforts to suggest that because pollution is caused by

other people (as was elucidated upon with regard to splitting), there is nothing individuals can

do so the issue may as well be ignored. In this regard, they might relate to tendencies to reject,

disallow or put aside unacceptable aspects of their experience, all of which relate to denial,

when persons "reject, disallow and put aside unacceptable aspects of their experience" (James

et al 2006: 161). Mei banfa and wunai might, accordingly, be translatable into English terms like "turning a blind eye", a stance which, like pragmatic acceptance, implies "numbness" (Giddens 1991: 135). By insisting the problem is too large to be impacted upon by individual actors, mei banfa might, consequently, conjure positive emotions endorsing Spinoza's view that bliss can only emerge once a person relinquishes the idea that a person is or can be in control (Soloman 2008: 7). In this sense, these terms might, like "letting go", enable release. Mei banfa might also be translated as "carrying on regardless", an attitude resembling pragmatic acceptance, or rationalization, which, according to Anthony Giddens, involves a concentration on "surviving" (1991: 135) and involves using "a reasonable excuse ... for behavior" (Simmers *et al* 2009: 254). During that weekend, for example, it seemed more people drove cars than normal. This was often justified by persons with children on the basis that more, rather than less, protection was needed. However, such stances might indicate a "disavowal of reality" which involves minimizing our own destructiveness in order to maintain a "delusional state of inner tranquillity as our dissenting and protesting inner voices are silenced" (Weintrobe 2013a: 8). Indeed, perhaps this is how we might *make* sense of Luo's commentary, presented earlier in this article. Although ostensibly relaxed, it could instead signify alienation, in the sense she sought to "brush out", as Cameron puts it in a different context, "of the picture … the difficult and challenging … aspects of what being human is about, and … on maintaining a narrative which says that 'all is well with us'" (2014: 11). Like the Germans to whom Primo

Levi refers, Luo might have sought to build an "illusion of not knowing and hence hot being

an accomplice to events in front of her" (1987, cited in Boltanski 1999: n.p.). Alternatively,

perhaps she really neither knew nor cared.

Sublimation

Freud's claim that jokes should be taken seriously (1905) with "laughter … connected not only

with joy but also anxiety" (Dodds 2011: 45) can inform how jokes circulating online are

interpreted, such as one sent during December 2013.

"A future conversation between Shanghai women:

A: 'Ai yo, sister, your mask is fabulous! What brand is it?'

B: 'Louis Vuitton, limited edition, special China version. Isn't it great?'

A: 'I bought a Hermes, leather outside, 13 layers of carbon filter and a golden logo in the middle. It's great, right!'

B: 'So fabulous! Let's go and have our IV drops together!'"

Persons I recounted this joke to found it funny even though it reproduces stereotypes of

Shanghainese as materialistic. What is more relevant, however, is the joke acknowledges

pollution *is happening*. It also refers to individualized strategies (see, for example, Tilt 2013:

294) for coping with pollution while highlighting their ineffectiveness. It also registers the fault

lines of stratification while recognizing that overconsumption in conjunction with other human behavior patterns (e.g. driving and travelling overseas) contributes to ecological crises. The joke, therefore, perhaps confronts that which is not, and perhaps cannot be, stated in other circumstances. However, the problem, namely overconsumption, is presented as the solution, as indeed it really is, albeit not a wholly effective one, given those individualistic responses discussed above. In this regard, the joke might also contain elements of denial since it implies pollution can be solved within society's existing organizational and institutional patterns rather than accepting changes to individual and group social norms, values and activities might be required. Crucially, the joke does not present simple solutions or "magical 'quick fixes'" (Weintrobe 2013b: 33). Instead and unlike many previously discussed tactics which, as Douglas observes of ways of treating anomalies, either ignore or condemn (1966: 39) this joke confronts the anomaly, painting a vivid, and not inaccurate, picture of everyday life in which pollution "has a place" (1966: 39). Accordingly, the joke might best be viewed as relating to sublimation, namely the cathartic transformation of impulses causing conflict into socially acceptable, and productive, activity.

Zhengnengliang 正能量 (positive energy or vibes, positivity), might equally relate to sublimation. Admittedly, when zhengnengliang is deemed to be manufactured, such as when pollution was constructed as "positive energy" which could unite residents in smog (Ramzy

2013), it evokes cynicism. However, when zhengnengliang circulates in other ways such as through photographs and words appearing in the "moments" [23] function of weixin, it is optimistic. Here there are copious posts relating to weather. These tend not to include apocalyptic images like those constructed in those previously discussed journalistic accounts. Instead, the number of texts posted when pollution levels are low is striking, and these tend to constitute images of blue skies accompanied by poetic words.

"It's like a phoenix's head [referring to a cloud in a predominantly blue sky]!"

"It's a long time since we met blue skies and white clouds. The best clear and refreshing qiugaoqishuang 秋高气爽 (autumn weather)! Every day has clear sky!"

"The sky is ridiculously / unbelievably blue. It's like in Australia!"

Such practices reveal how blue-sky days become embellished by virtue of being incorporated into a system recognizing the existence of air pollution. They might, accordingly, be read as art, "one of the few remaining reservoirs of the pleasure-principle, where we can imagine other worlds, other reality principles" (Dodds 2011: 146). However, incessant posting of blue skies and checking for PM2.5 might equally relate to mourning. As Charles Briggs notes, mourning involves "hyper-cathexis", namely excessive investment of interest in an object which has been lost: this object is, nevertheless, imbued "with such intense psychic energy" that it may be

"psychically prolonged" through a "fantasy world" in which persons allow themselves to believe the object was never lost and has returned (2014: 313). Consequently, such ostensibly innocuous pictures of blue-sky days might also be viewed as products of "anticipatory mourning" which involves "withdrawing cathexis from the object before it is lost, as a narcissistic defence to avoid the painful process of a mourning" (Dodds 2011: 73). In fact, these posts are so incessant they might be products of "periods of nervous, restless activity" (Vickroy 2002: 12) associated with trauma.

However, as the division of psychic processes into discrete parts masks how they overlap and intersect with each other so it suggests an erroneous and illusionary coherence within categories. Put differently, these "jokes", like commentary described in the first part of this article, reveal multivoicedness. It is, therefore, not only possible to read escapism, engagement, pleasure, fantasy, mourning, anxiety, perhaps even trauma, and cynicism between "jokes" but also within them, and the persons who speak them. Even ostensibly humorous texts like that referring to "ridiculously" blue skies (the implication being they were manufactured by government agencies as was the case during the APEC conference) exhibit cynical pessimism, namely "a mode of dampening the emotional impact of anxieties through either a humorous or a world-weary response to them" (Giddens 1991: 136). There is, in short, fluidity between categories and events, as is especially evident in posts, and commentary, which might be cynical but

which, nevertheless, display an excess of meaning, voices and systems of thought. Consequently, they escape efforts to classify them as simply one thing or another. Consider, for example, Song who complained of diminished life quality with the mournfulness of a melancholic while, nevertheless, not only making practical suggestions, namely reducing outdoor activity on polluted days and developing a people-oriented approach to government, but also (with the world-weariness of a cynic) mocking political slogans, especially those circulating during the Cultural Revolution, despite working in government himself. After suggesting, "yi ren wei ben" 以人为本 (put people first, a popular slogan), for example, Song concluded people should geming le guan zhu yi da wuwei 革命乐观主义大无畏 ("show revolutionary optimism and a fearless spirit"). While Song's commentary might encapsulate the in-discreteness of categories, he might more broadly illustrate how, as Mary Douglas has observed, the more we "search for purity", that is "*force* experience into logical categories of non-contradiction" the more we find ourselves "led into contradiction" (1966: 163, emphasis added).

Concluding Thoughts

This article has not only explored psychic experiences of air pollution and how these become narrated in texts of various kinds but also the messiness, or figurative fog, of fieldwork and efforts to transform this into a written account. Both circumstances seem to induce tendencies

to erase, or otherwise "write over", anxieties in order to create coherence out of indeterminacy; and order from disorder. In everyday life, for example, persons deploy tactics to manage anxieties in order to enable simultaneous engagement with, and withdrawal from, the environments in which they find themselves. Because such tactics are disjointed and perhaps even "makeshift" persons populating this article are, like those to whom Robert Desjarlais refers, "struggling along", albeit in different circumstances (1996: 70ff). When Chinese air pollution comes under the gaze of both local and non-local journalists, however, it is often implicated in "us" versus "them" storylines. These deny, disavow and project, combining to repudiate relational and intersubjective experiences and perspectives. In fieldwork, meanwhile, and in those texts produced because of this, anxieties and doubts are gradually "written over", or hidden, even though they resurface.

Such tendencies to systematize panic and cosmic anxiety [24] are, therefore, seemingly characteristic of both anthropomorphic and scientific thought. In everyday life, according to psychology textbooks, defence mechanisms (which constitute unconscious acts) *help* persons *deal* with unpleasant situations, and socially unacceptable behaviours. In any event, so they say, everyone uses them, to some degree (Simmers *et al* 2009: 253). Admittedly, the reflexivity permeating this article (e.g. recognizing the tensions and contradictions associated with not only the project but also participants) might be acceptable to some qualitative researchers who

are sympathetic to such claims as objective reality "can never be captured" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5) and that it is, accordingly, necessary to try to tell (and read) stories (as well as persons) from different points of view. However, this might offend adherents of "value-free objective science" who contend "truth" can, and no doubt should, transcend "opinion and personal bias" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 8) and that the accounts emergent from this should be less provisional and contingent.

Although it is not my intention to claim edifying accounts more accurately mirror reality than systematic explanations, this article has argued they should be placed "on the same existential footing", as Richard Rorty has claimed more generally (1979: 365-394, cited in Jackson 1996: 7). In so doing, they can, like rhizomes and arboreal structures, function as a pair being both "antithetical *and* complementary" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 351, emphasis added), thereby constituting correctives to each other. This article has, nevertheless, argued it is especially important that texts intent upon exploring the psychic effects of living in highly polluted environments represent "*the conversation of social life*" (Rapport 1997: 190, emphasis in original) not only as it is lived *between* people but also *within* them. This necessitates acknowledging "anxieties, deficits, conflicts, phantasies and defences" (Dodds 2011: xi). The alternative, namely to repress, "write over" or refuse to acknowledge them—and, therefore, present and engage with smoothed, and flattened, versions of ourselves—is not only violent (to

"reality", and ourselves) but also unhealthy, like excessive use of defence mechanisms (see, for example, Simmers *et al* 2009: 254). This is because they result in powerful abstractions, or "tokens *of* the real" which, like those Enlightenment figures introduced at the start of this article, can, as Jackson explains elsewhere, "easily become mistaken *for* the real" (1996: 5). In any event, efforts to hide, or otherwise "write over" contradictions seem ineffective. Instead, they persist, refusing to disappear and vanish. Because efforts to conceal them might make their presence even more disturbing, [25] they might better be admitted, even if this compels engagement with what Carl Jung termed our "shadow", a reservoir of psychic potential composed of both positive and negative aspects. Jung warns that "man" [sic] is "on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow ... But if it is repressed ... it never gets corrected, and is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness" (1958 [1975]: 76). It might, accordingly, be crucial to "confront our ... 'dirt', including ... the disavowed aspects of ourselves that we project outwards or otherwise defend against' (Dodds 2011: 55). Such recognition may result in expansive texts and persons: and even if this does not make especially comfortable reading, it might be reassuring to recognize, as Susan Koger and Deborah Winter observe, that from a psychoanalytic perspective "being willing to experience discomfort is the first step toward a solution to our problems" (2008: 38).

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[1] Bakhtin observes of monologue that it is "finalized and ... manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons" (1984: 293).

[2] Durkheim's concept of the social fact is deployed to illustrate the influence of society over individuals. Social facts are, therefore, coercive and capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint (1895 [1982]: 51).

For Durkheim social behaviours are *not* the result of individual quirks of consciousness. Instead, they are the result of the social conditions in which individuals find themselves. While some social facts are already crystallized, others are more fluid social currents that, nevertheless, still "possess the *same ... ascendancy over the individual* [my italics]" (1895 [1982]: 52).

3 *Weibo* is a Chinese microblogging website, akin to a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook, as an article on Wikipedia explains.

4 In one regard, my use of the term "western media" is merely a shortcut. I am, therefore, aware the term is reductionist. However, my deployment of this term is slightly provocative; implying homogeneity in the ways "China stories" are constructed. Usage of the term might also suggest how English-language media of *all* kinds, from tabloids and broadsheets to serious and frivolous documentary films, not only have tendencies to make stories of "Manichean simplicity" (Barmé 2000: xvii) but also "demonize China" (Weston and Jensen 2000: 3) rather than documenting the "complex" realities *behind* these headlines (see, for example, Cockain 2012: 3-7). Admittedly, this article is mainly concerned with media reports from the UK and the USA, especially those appearing in *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*. These pre-eminent newspapers can be classified as contemporary versions of the "prestige press" to which Ithiel de Sola Pool referred in the 1950s (1952). Nevertheless, these elite agenda-setters should not necessarily be considered immune from such criticisms, as this article reveals.

5 All manner of events—urban demolition, surveillance of the Internet and so on—are narrativized so they unequivocally reveal the ineffectiveness of, and dissatisfaction with, Communist party rule (see, for example, Chang 2001).

6 Hook, Mason and O'Shea observe, for example, that during the entire 1990s leading Japanese newspapers carried only 17 articles featuring the Japanese terms for "China" and "transboundary pollution". However, between 2010 and 2014 there were already 79 published. These numbers are, they explain, conservative given the terms "transboundary pollution" are technical terms (2015: 51). The number of stories relating to China and air pollution are, in short, likely to be much more.

7 Air quality that is of "significant concern" to the World Health Organization is described as "good" in China. Matters become even more complicated when China's Ministry of Environmental Protection claim it is "obviously inappropriate" to report Chinese air quality based on foreign standards (Andrews 2014).

8 For example, a special edition of papers relating to pollution and health was entitled "dying for development", a phrase that, as Lora-Wainwright explains, "highlights this tension between desiring development and yet suffering its negative impact on the environment and health" (2013a: 245).

9 Deng and Yang, similarly, explain how "pollution and protest are mediated by local and practical contexts", highlighting factors like community relations and economic dependence, or the lack thereof (2013: 334).

10 This article refers to about 10 persons by name, although such persons have been given pseudonyms.

11 Such wording is adapted from questions posed by Clifford and Marcus at the beginning of their *Writing Culture* (1986: np).

12 Linda Finlay provides a compelling account of how the "opportunities" and "challenges" of reflexivity might be negotiated within research, explaining how early "anthropological 'realist tales', where researchers conscientiously recorded observations in an effort to prove their scientific credentials, have gradually given way to more personal 'confessional tales' where researchers describe decisions and dilemmas of their fieldwork experience" (2002: 210).

13 Although I am aware that the term "informant" might be read as an "othering" device which makes persons come across as abstracted emotional states *torn* from the fabric of everyday life (like those in those journalistic accounts which began this article), like Michael Agar I am unsure what a new or alternate term could or should be (1980 [1996]: x).

14 Isiah Berlin's observation that "Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made" (1990: 48) might inform the ideas presented in this part of the article.

15 Geertz explains this is disguised "because it has been generally cast not as a narratological issue, a matter of how best to get an honest story honestly told, but as an epistemological one, a matter of how to prevent subjective views from coloring objective facts" (1988: 9).

16 I later discovered this image appeared in several other editions of the newspaper and in other publications indicating it was—and is—a "stock image", namely one that can be repeatedly deployed, perhaps as a consequence of its lack of semantic ambiguity.

17 Harold Isaacs, for example, identified the interplay of two visions of Chinese in the American imagination: one based on admirable qualities, e.g. stoicism and courage, and the other composed of negative traits, e.g. barbarity and ruthlessness (1958). While the man might represent the first of these polarized images, the second is implied by references in these texts to an uncaring government that does not prioritize the well-being of its citizens.

18 As Stuart Hall explains, "it is discourse, not the subjects who speak it, which produce knowledge. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of the episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth, of a particular period and culture" (1997: 55).

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[19] Lora-Wainwright distinguishes between "popular epidemiology" and "lay epidemiology". The former refers to processes "by which laypersons gather scientific data and other information, and also direct and marshal the knowledge and resources of experts in order to understand the epidemiology of disease" (Brown 2000: 266, cited in Lora-Wainwright 2013b: 304). The latter refers to "a scheme in which individuals interpret health risks through the routine observation and discussion of cases of illness and death in personal networks and in the public arena, as well as from formal and informal evidence arising from other sources, such as television and magazines" (Frankel, Davison and Davey Smith 1991: 428, cited in 2013b: 305).

[20] Such processes might inform how we understand how journalists from outside China represent *Chinese* air pollution. For example, projection might enable the pan-global, cross-cultural, implications of air pollution to be construed as if they are located elsewhere, thereby protecting journalists from their own anxieties and inner struggles.

[21] The complete video can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHqoYLpR8Ks (11 August 2016). On youku, a Chinese site similar to youtube, the video has been viewed more than one million times.

[22] The film, *Under the Dome*, can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6X2uwlQGQM.

[23] This allows users to share personal information amongst contacts, unless specific persons are blocked, and comment upon content shared by other users.

[24] George Devereux used the term "cosmic anxieties" (1967: 18) to refer to the "unresponsiveness of matter" (1967: 32), although I am deploying the term in a more expansive sense to refer to human tendencies to impose order over the contingent and provisional.

[25] As Žižek puts it, the more an object is covered, 'the more ... attention focuses on ... what lies beneath the veil'; and 'the more the object is veiled, the more intensely disturbing is the minimal trace of its remainder' (2006: 103).