**Notar, Beth E. 2006. *Displacing Desire: Travel and Popular Culture in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.**

**Wilson, Chris. 1997. *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.**

Cultural conservation is a key component of many modern studies of culture, cultural and ethnic groups, tourism, space, place, and displacement. Along with these topics come others that play a pertinent role in cultural studies, especially the field of folklore: tradition, group, and authenticity. These topics do not stop at borders, but rather span time, place, language, and ideas. By reading *Displacing Desire: Travel and Popular Culture in China* and *The Myth of Santa Fe: Creating a Modern Regional Tradition*, the expanse of this topics and their effects to communities and groups in and not in the immediate area become evident. It is my hope that this review will bring to light these topics and issues by discussing each text in depth, comparing and contrasting the two texts, and also placing them in the larger landscape of cultural conservation.

For a brief summary of the texts, in *The Myth of Santa Fe*, Chris Wilson discusses the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico in both its modern and historical sense; from its creation and its “re-creation” as a city saturated in an ethnic or regional style characteristic of its architecture, the Santa Fe style. Wilson, while looking at architectural features and changes over the years, also integrates in a strong basis of the cultural and political landscape that changed and situated Santa Fe as the city it became. It is this rich basis of research which is layered with architectural examples that creates a holistic picture of a city with a supposed tradition of décor and building.

Beth Notar, in *Displacing Desire*, goes about her study of the Chinese town of Dali in a seemingly straightforward line of research using three examples: the Lonely Planet travel guide, the film *Five Golden Flowers*, and the novel *Heavenly Dragons*. Each example is based on the city of Dali and what is thought to be traditional for the city and the people who live there. She incorporates her own perspectives and experiences as a way to provide an even deeper understanding of a place, not just a superficial gloss of ideas. Her examination is filled with outside sources and ideas that seem to play an important role in anthropological studies of groups and places.

Thinking about cultural conservation with architecture seems to come much easier for me than other topics. Architecture, for me sometimes, seems to be a concrete outwardly expression of a culture, especially cultural ideas of and use of space and landscape. However, these ideas that are thought to be represented in vernacular architecture can often be erased or covered over with ideas of the popular or majority culture in the area. I saw this as the case with Santa Fe.

Wilson begins his exposition by looking at architecture and architectural influences before what we now know as the predominating style of Santa Fe existed. I feel as if this is information that anyone who has studied history or architecture at some point probably knows but just does not connect the dots fully to recognize what has happened. I am part of this group; I am well aware that town planning and construction methods are a creolization of Pueblo, Spanish, and Mexican ideas and techniques (not to mention the long list of other groups Wilson gives on page 3), however I failed to realize that these ideas that have been compiled into what we now know as the predominating style of Santa Fe are mere constructions. It is here that the title of this text becomes most significant. What we see and think of as the Santa Fe style is ultimately a projection of those inside the city as well as those outside, and what we are expected to want to see in order to boost and support ideas of cultural identity as well as tourism. What we see becomes a sort of lie of historicity and traditionality. In the end, what we see is projected truth, but in fact the layers of historical and cultural meaning are missing, leaving us with a void in our understanding. This of course, is also linked to the social and political issues and changes. As outlined by Wilson, these changes and problems have run rampant in the American southwest; issues with cultural identity and belonging often shaped the majority of problems and ideas in the area. There is no exception with Santa Fe, whether in its Mexican or American statehood years. Even these cultural boundaries, limits, and groups are myths on their own accord and play a large part into the creation of the city and the ideals and images expected to be produced by the city and for the city.

In some cases, architectural styles are linked directly with progress. For example, it becomes evident that the use of styles that evoked American movements were seen as more progressive and therefore more desired. In short, Americanization was linked to progress, not the backwards ways of cultural groups who had been building in and inhabiting the area for years. Again, we lose what is historically and culturally true, for what only seems to be more important. Of course, this idea changed in history, but authenticity is still a problem and often misrepresented. Now, things like the Kiva fireplace and *vigas* are used, but they represent romanticized ideals of traditional construction methods and features. Oftentimes, as Wilson describes, these features are put back into structures to serve as a sort of house-museum to display these quaint constructions. In the end, nothing that is done is truly authentic, no matter how real it looks or feels.

China’s heritage is rich in its diverse regions, peoples, languages, and customs. The city of Dali is no exclusion of this fact. Notar discretely discusses these differences among people and geography in her discussion of Dali, but also in her analysis of cultural texts which define the city and its people for the rest of China and the world.

The title of this text seems a bit misplaced when you start to read it; we often think of travel and popular culture as situating specific types of desire, not displacing it. While I do believe this to be a fact, I also support Notar’s ideas on the displacement of desire and how media that is created, such as travel guides and movies help to play into the desire to explore and see but also a more reflexive displaced desire. By displaced, I believe that Notar is referring to the things that we discover once we see that what we think as real and traditional as not. She discusses heavily the topic of nostalgia and tradition. In this context, these are the things that ultimately become displaced for both the traveler and the inhabitant. These ideas seem to play heavily into the notion of space and place; can we have both and not have both at the same time? In her final conclusion, Notar cites another scholar with the term “symbolic displacement”. I think this term would have been better for the title, as it gives more insight into what is occurring. In general, this symbolic displacement is what is happening. The people who are being represented (Dali and the Bai people) are separating themselves from this representation. It seems to be a sort of postmodern representation; the inhabitants see what is being represented of them and they separate. Even though they are individual entities, the ideas are still being circulated in mainstream culture as what is “authentic” or “traditional”.

This becomes evident in the creation of the Foreigner’s Street in Dali and the change of dress and demeanor of locals and café operators to fit what travelers want. They come for an authentic experience, but stop at the visual level; they do not want to eat or speak authentically but rather experience a simple veneer of the authentic, which in this case is created to satisfy tourists. This idea continues with the movie *Five Golden Flowers* and the book *Heavenly Dragons*, and the creation of the movie sets and theme parks such as Daliwood that are fake but are created so that people can see what they are expecting to see, but also have a chance to act out those things that they desire. In the end, the desire ends up being displaced onto Dali; tourist have a desire to find something that they had and lost or never had. The displaced desire is for nostalgia, not a theme park designed to look like a movie set or a popular culture icon.

These two sites of contestation, Santa Fe and Dali have things that are similar as well as those that are not. Each site is unique in its location and history, but they share the same story of erasure, lost history, blurred cultural identity, and the effects of tourism and change.

The most obvious similarity between these two texts, I borrowed from the genius of John Dorst and his look at the analysis of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania in his text *The Written Suburb.* Dorst’s ideas of veneer, false historicity, and vignette played into my own understanding of these two texts. This is a commonality between the two, even though they are nations and cultures apart. Strictly speaking, both cities have a thick veneer that is expressed to outsiders but also insiders in some instances. For Santa Fe, this veneer is found in the applied styles of architecture that are supposedly “authentic” and “traditional”, however as a veneer they lack the historicity which makes them authentic and traditional. To me, this is akin to the Scrape architectural style, as explained by Wilson, where whatever was applied first was removed to create a blank slate onto which whatever was desired to be demonstrated and represented was placed. These ideas are lost but still represented as fact and present. There is also a standard *cultural* veneer in the city of Santa Fe as well. Cultural group’s practices, such as those common to the Spanish immigrants or the native Pueblo Indians are lost and glossed over to create one homogenous Santa Fe style. On a more abstract level, the cultural veneer also exists on the people; a general veneer is placed on inhabitants, naming them as people of Santa Fe and in the end, losing the layers of historical importance that emanated from the integrated communities of natives and immigrants; the Spanish, Mexicans, Puebloans, Anglos, etc.

Of course this veneer is also prevalent in Dali, to much the same extent as it is in Santa Fe. The Foreigner’s street provides an excellent discussion on veneer; the street and its cafes, shops, and guesthouses lack a real historical basis but are rather thin plaster slatherings of “tradition” and “authenticity” on top of an unwanted surface. This metaphor of completing a wall can be extended even further, these thin veneers of the correct, real, and appropriate are then sanded and finished down even more until they seem to represent the authentic and traditional but are merely altered layers of nothingness lacking in real history and meaning. Along with the idea of veneer is the idea of vignette, as introduced by Dorst. Where I see veneer playing the central role in Santa Fe, I see vignette as playing the central role in Dali. Two great examples are given with Daliwood and the tour-able movie sets. Both of these I see as classic examples of exactly what Dorst was discussing in Chadds Ford; these places are enclosed and function as their own little worlds, which are “authentic”. We, as tourist are *allowed* to penetrate these vignettes and see inside. Daliwood is a great example of this at work. When tourists arrive at to the main gate, they must walk in and immediately they transform status from tourist to guest. They are told to leave their world behind symbolically and literally, but getting off the bus and walking into the welcome gates. The tourists/guests are given the opportunity to enter into a small, contained world of idealized Dali that exists inside the real world of Dali. If this is not a great example of vignette, then I am not sure what is.

Both veneer and vignette are exacerbated by tourism, which in the cases of Santa Fe and Dali can be thought of as a major problem. To keep this obvious idea short, veneer and vignettes work to produce what is expected and desired, often times creating tradition. This idea comes up in the Bendix reading, *Tourism and Cultural Displays: Inventing Traditions for Whom?* in which the community at Interlaken, in order to placate tourists has to create several festivals and events. In the end, the question of for whom these “traditional” occurrences should be created and to what extent. Wilson states that “Santa Fe is an extreme and therefore instructive example of the invention of tradition and the on-going interaction of ethnic identity with tourist image making” (7). Notar never says it as plain as Wilson, but I do believe that she would agree that Dali, in its more modern sense facilitates tourism by creating tradition.

Another similarity with the two texts is that both are examples of displaced desire. As I previously discussed, desire in Dali is displaced nostalgia for what we have had and lost (in the sense of the local inhabitant and Dali) or the things that we wish we had, but never did or will (in the sense of the tourist). I do feel that Santa Fe falls into this same dichotomy of nostalgia that which we had and that which we will never have.

As far as differences, the most obviously is size and extent, as well as disciplinary backgrounds of the researchers. First, Sante Fe, while I am not sure on the actual geographical size comparison with Dali seems to be more isolated culturally. While both are smaller entities within a larger nation, Dali seems to have spread more around not just China, but the world according to Notar’s work. Wilson however, in his presentation of the topic seems to keep it on a smaller scale, even though I am sure that the Sante Fe style, as eluded to in his inclusion of its use in EuroDisney, is a more worldly pervasive ideal. The writing style of the two authors and their fields of study is what makes this difference truly noticeable. Notar also pulls examples from popular culture, whereas Wilson does not. If this were reversed and Wilson were to delve more into popular culture, I am sure that the proliferation of the Santa Fe style would be more pervasive than that which is focused on Dali. Notar’s examples make it seem as if popular culture surrounding Dali spread more than that of Santa Fe, but as noted, this seems to be a discrepancy on part of the authors.

The depth of fieldwork also seems to be a significant difference between the two texts. Wilson, while his work is dense in historical and cultural aspects, his work lacks input from actual people who are/were inhabitants of Santa Fe. This is probably because his background is not folklore, but rather architectural history which seems to be the major tone of his text. Notar, on the other hand incorporated plenty of personal fieldwork and actual voices of people who were parts of the community. Her background is in anthropology, so this makes sense. This adds a more human facet to her work and in turn, makes it more personable and relatable.

Generally speaking, the cultural matrix of Dali seems to be less than that of Santa Fe. Numerically speaking only, there appear to have been more cultures that went into creating the Santa Fe style than what is represented in Dali, which is namely the cultural constructions of the Bai people. China’s cultural matrix is just as numbered and diverse as the United States, no doubt to that fact whatsoever, but in these representations that seems to not be the case.

Expanse of the text is also another big difference. While Wilson outlines nearly the entire history of the culture area that Santa Fe is part of, Notar does not really give much historical or cultural background to Dali or China for that matter. Being a foreign land to me, I would have much preferred a more in-depth background so situate me in Dali and China. Along with this, Wilson went about his text discussing culture and ethnic groups and even devotes two entire chapters to the exploration of these cultural and ethnic ideas, as well as a chapter on festivals and fiestas that helped to solidify these groups. Notar never really gives the reader this information, just a couple of maps to situate oneself geographically, but never much to situate oneself culturally. That context was a strong suite for Wilson and a mark missed for Notar.

How do these ideas presented play into the idea of cultural conservation and on a grander scheme, folklore? According to Loomis, cultural conservation is a way of thinking that organizes private and public efforts that have traditional community and community life at their cores and seeks to protect it. This idea of conserving culture is never really explicitly stated in either text, however there are definite undertones of this idea running throughout the chapters of each. I see Wilson and Notar’s texts as a sort of critique to the idea of cultural conservation, especially in the steps that we should be taking in order to preserve that which is culturally significant or important to both insiders and outsiders. I imagine that this is the reason he provided such a full-bodied background into the cultural and architectural history of the city. With this, Wilson shows what has been lost, or not conserved and how this happened. It forces us to open our eyes to what we think as particular styles specific to a region or city, such as the Santa Fe style.

I find Notar’s work along the same lines; by emphasizing the changes themselves and problems with the changes in the city of Dali, Notar is ultimately commenting on the status of actual culture in Dali and the conservation of what is authentic and traditional. She seems to place this within a dichotomy of that which is authentic and that which is not, especially since that which is not authentic is what people are actively seeking when they travel to Dali. I think that in the long run, Notar is asking us to look at the state of cultural conservation but also, the effects that agents such as tourism and popular culture have on the culture. I wish Wilson would have included these facets in his work as well; this seems as if it would have been a strong piece of research to add. As previously mentioned, Wilson does mention EuroDisney is passing. The work of tourism and popular culture on the culture and styles found in Santa Fe could be a fascinating extension of his work thus far.

In summary, the emic and etic use of space and place, alongside cultural and economic innovations such as nostalgia and created tradition and authenticity play an integral role in the creation and maintenance of locations and their meaning, worldwide. It becomes apparent that these things happen on the grand scale, not just in bustling western towns in the United States or villages tucked within the Himalayan foothills and lakes of China. What we see, or expect to see, be it Chinese pagodas or puddled adobe structures may not be as real as they feel. These feelings of what is authentic and traditional often become muddied by our own expectations and longing for nostalgia. But in the end, when we reach these places and spaces that have meaning imbued in them, we often realize that the nostalgia is still there…we desire what we think is real and have lost or something that we will never have. In the end, all desire for authentic and traditional aspects of our cultures, our experiences, or our architecture are displaced and ultimately, untouchable and unattainable.