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- Daniel Dominguez
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- Clara Fannjiang
- Dylan Fugel
- Ryoko Hamaguchi
- Catherine Harris
- Adam Levine
- Madeline Sacks
- Bojan Srbinovski
- Samantha Steele
- Sarah Yamamoto
- Ray Zhou

**PWR Nominees**
- Alisha Adam
- Maya Balakrishnan
- Nikita Bogdanov
- Austin Chustz
- Nikita Desai
- Tulsee Doshi
- Emily Field
- Mallory Frazier
- Katerina Gregoriou
- Catherine Harris
- Afia Khan
- Kenny Leung
- Andrew Lim
- Cooper Lindsey
- Cole Manley
- Sara Maurer
- Toki Migimatsu
- Nicolas Perdomo
- Brittany Presten
- Paul Quigley
- Dana Ritchie
- Laura Rose
- Sarah Sadlier
- Alex Salton
- Rohan Sampath
- Ian Sparkman
- Virginia Steindorf
- Emma Steinkellner
- Neal Ulrich
- Nolan Walsh
- Karen Wang
- Benjamin Weems
- Zachary Weinstein
- Renjie Wong

**IHUM /THINK Finalists**
- Samuel Cady
- Kay Dannenmaier
- Eric Hertz
- Chloe Koseff
- Sabeeb Pradhan
- Eric Theis
- Emily Truong
- Emeline Wu
- Olivia Wu

**IHUM/THINK Nominees**
- Akshay Agrawal
- Hashim AlAwami
- Jazmin Harper
- Nadav Hollander
- Nina Jimenez
- Marie Lu
- Laura Marsh
- Dylan Moore
- Alya Naqvi
- Ivanna Pearlstein
- Cayla Pettinato
- Grant Sanderson
- Ellen Sebastian
- Max Walker-Silverman
- Lucy Svoboda
- Sachie Weber
- Jacob Winnikoff
- Joseph Zabel
- Alfred Zong

**SLE Nominees**
- Alex Adamson
- Isabelle Barnard
- Ben Diego
- Eric Eichelberger
- Taylor Grossman
- Sandy Huang
- Ben Isaacs
- Kimberly Krebs
- Teo Lamiot
- Reade Levinson
- Jack Martinez
- Ileana Najarro
- Mohammed Rahman
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- Amy Tomasso
Foreword

Thanks to the generosity of the late D. Power Boothe Jr., his wife Catie, and their son Barry, the Boothe Prizes recognize and reward outstanding expository, argumentative, and research-based writing of first-year students at Stanford. Each quarter, instructors nominate superior student works to Boothe Prize committee judges. Then we collect and publish the winning papers. At a celebratory ceremony each spring, we award the Boothe Prizes and honor these talented student writers and their instructors.

This volume of essays from spring and autumn 2012 and winter 2013 represents the broad range of critical engagement achieved by Stanford's first-year writers. They reveal the diverse research opportunities available to Stanford's first-year students and how these students have negotiated their writing assignments. As you will see, these papers demonstrate clear analytic power and sophisticated rhetorical skills. The quality of work that these students have produced over the course of one quarter, while managing the demands of their other courses, is remarkable. We take particular pleasure, then, in honoring these superior young scholars.

Our special thanks go to the Boothe family for their support and encouragement of Stanford's first-year PWR, Thinking Matters, Structured Liberal Education, and Education as Self-Fashioning students in offering the Boothe Prizes and making possible the publication of these essays. We also thank the Boothe Prize Selection Committees for PWR, Thinking Matters, Structured Liberal Education, Education as Self-Fashioning, and the Project Committee, who have planned, edited, and produced Boothe Prize Essays 2013. Most of all, our appreciation goes out to all the talented first-year writers whose essays have been nominated for the Boothe Prize and, especially, to the students whose exemplary work we include in this volume.

Please enjoy!

—Harry J. Elam, Jr.
Freeman-Thornton Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
Olive H. Palmer Professor in the Humanities
Bass University Fellow in Undergraduate Education
Essays from

The Program in Writing and Rhetoric

Stanford University

Boothe Prize Winners & Honorable Mentions
INTRODUCTION

First-year writing, one of Stanford’s oldest educational traditions, has been taught since the founding of the University. Current courses in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) provide a setting in which students new to the University can focus their intellectual energies intently on the art and craft of writing. PWR’s small seminar/workshop classes offer students the opportunity to develop their writing abilities in analysis and research-based argument with the careful and consistent guidance of an experienced writing instructor.

The PWR requirement at Stanford currently consists of two courses. While the second-level PWR 2 course emphasizes oral and multimedia presentations of research, PWR 1, the first-year course in which students write the essays nominated for the Boothe Prize, centers on various forms of analysis and substantial research-based projects. The essays selected as the Winners and Honorable Mentions for the Boothe Prize represent the best of students’ work in these areas; it is our pleasure to share them with the larger Stanford community.

The PWR curriculum aims to lead students toward strong performance in all elements of writing, including crafting a persona that will effectively appeal to a particular audience, developing a compelling argumentative thesis drawing on primary and secondary sources, putting forward cogent proofs with persuasive evidence and reasoning, and writing with power and grace. Each of these essays demonstrates the ways in which PWR courses guide Stanford’s first-year students in presenting their ideas with the intellectual rigor and stylistic force expected of University students.

As Directors of the Program, we have been impressed over and over again by how well these newest members of the University community have met the challenges of first-year writing. We value the intellectual curiosity, freshness of thought and expression, and engagement with the ideas of others represented in the essays published here, and we offer our deepest congratulations to these writers as well as to their instructors.

—Nicholas Jenkins
Faculty Director, Program in Writing and Rhetoric

—Marvin Diogenes
Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

“Managing the Mean Girl” addresses a widespread problem in schools: girls’ social aggression, which is usually expressed through verbal abuse, negative body language, rumor spreading or outright social exclusion. Though this behavior has often been the subject of comedy in media such as Mean Girls and Gossip Girl, its consequences are far from trivial. Anxiety, long-term distrust of relationships, and in some cases, suicidal ideation have all resulted from girl-on-girl social aggression. Kirstin’s essay skillfully proves that in a culture that encourages girls to suppress their hostile, angry feelings, educators will have to develop strategies that teach girls to express their unhappiness appropriately [in less destructive ways?]. Yet the strategies that have proven effective in mitigating direct, physical aggression tend to exacerbate social aggression. If told to “stop and think,” for example, girls may devise even more intricate, covert forms of aggression.

Kirstin provocatively argues that state policy must take the lead in reforming girl culture. Using the State of California as a case study, Kirstin’s research reveals that policy lags behind the scholarship. Given what scholars now understand about social aggression, insufficient policies have been developed to help schools combat it. In an appendix at the end of this paper, Kirstin specifies strategies that will provide principals, teachers and girls proven means to banish social aggression from schools. As Kirstin so eloquently concludes, the State should not be understood to be “regulating a cruel behavior, but as teaching girls to speak a language that they have previously been denied.”

—Sarah Pittock
Managing the Mean Girl: California’s Incomplete State Policy on Social Aggression

KIRSTIN WAGNER

What do girls think of each other? Middle school girls interviewed by Rachel Simmons offered the following disturbing perspectives:

“Girls are secretive.”

“They destroy you from the inside.”

“There’s an aspect of evil in girls that there isn’t in boys.”

“Girls target you where they know you’re weakest.”

“Girls plan and premeditate.” (16)

Is it possible that Simmons merely happened upon a group of particularly misogynist preteen girls? Research would suggest not: these girls’ harsh condemnations of the duplicitous behaviors of their own sex are echoed across numerous studies of girls’ aggression.1 And why should they have anything nice to say about each other when so many of them experience victimization at each other’s hands? In a recent study, all ninety-eight of the girls involved reported having been victims of social aggression, which includes gossip, exclusion, or betrayal at the hands of other girls within a several week time-span (Remillard and Lamb). Noting the number of girls who engage in this behavior, past researchers concluded that females must be genetically

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1 See Owens, Brown, Ringrose and Renold, and especially Simmons’s Odd Girl Speaks Out for further examples of girls’ negative opinions of each other.
predisposed to social aggression (Brown 3). However, in 2002, sparked by Simmons’s book *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, researchers came to the new consensus that our culture “refuses girls access to open conflict” and “forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms” (Simmons 3). They also found that social aggression occurs predominantly in schools (O’Malley), and may even be unintentionally reinforced by teachers and staff (Brown 209).

In response to these and other findings concerning bullying at school, several researchers began analyzing state anti-bullying policies and publications directed towards schools to ensure that states were effectively addressing social aggression, as well as other forms of bullying. These researchers examined the definitions of bullying that states provided to make sure that social aggression and other behaviors were included. Apart from inspecting the definition, however, these researchers did not analyze how state policies specifically address individual bullying behaviors such as social aggression or direct aggression. Instead, they evaluated the state based on how its proposed strategies dealt with “bullying” as a whole. Even in the lone study that focused exclusively on social aggression in state policy, the only measurement used for determining whether a state addressed this behavior was its presence in the definition of bullying (Temkin). Each of these researchers’ methodologies operates on the same flawed assumption—that the policies and programs effective for decreasing direct aggression, which includes behaviors such as verbal abuse and physical harm, would also be effective in decreasing social aggression, which includes behaviors such as gossiping and social exclusion. According to this line of reasoning, a state needs only include social aggression in its definition of bullying and provide strategies for decreasing “bullying” in order to effectively address this behavior.

Based on my study of California laws, policies, and publications on bullying, this premise does not hold true. Though California generally does a thorough job of defining social aggression and including it in the definition of bullying, the strategies provided, or the lack thereof, do not supply schools with the information and techniques that they need to reduce the prevalence of this behavior. My research suggests that state policies reflect a problematic conceptualization of social aggression as simply the “girl” version of direct aggression, which is a stereotypically masculine behavior. This misconception appears to have led policy makers to the belief that these two forms of aggression are similar at heart and can therefore be tackled in the same way, hence the state policy’s monolithic approach to decreasing

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2 See Temkin, Orobo, Hallford; Limber and Small; La Rocco, Nestler-Rusack, and Freiberg; Stuart-Cassel, Bell, and Springer.
“bullying” rather than specific behaviors. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the current California state policies and publications on bullying are oriented toward direct aggression and, as such, provide inadequate guidance to schools on social aggression. Throughout, I will offer suggestions for how the state’s policies may be altered so as to effectively address this behavior; my recommendations are summarized in Appendix A. When the language of state policy explicitly addresses social aggression, it gives teachers and girls the ability to do so as well.

NOT JUST HURT FEELINGS: WHY SOCIAL AGGRESSION AND STATE POLICY MATTER

The ongoing debate over the appropriate terminology for this type of aggression has created confusion that may contribute to state policy’s incomplete coverage of this behavior. Initially, it was called indirect aggression to distinguish it from direct aggression which “includes physical reactions such as hitting, pushing, and tripping as well as overt verbal attacks such as name calling, taunting, and threatening” (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, and Little 1186). However, many researchers have objected to this term on the grounds that the descriptor indirect falsely implies that bullies always conceal their identity from their victims (Underwood 18). Girls often act in very direct ways to hurt each other and do not bother to conceal their actions; one girl overtly excluding another from a group is an example. Another term, relational aggression, attempts to capture the mechanism by which girls manipulate and hurt each other—their relationships (Underwood 22). However, this term, like indirect aggression, was defined as excluding direct expressions of anger, meaning that aggressive behaviors both relational and direct were left without a name; an example would be one girl demanding a favor from another and threatening to end their friendship if the other girl did not comply. In order to create a more holistic definition, Britt Galen and Marion Underwood advocate for the term social aggression, which “is directed toward damaging another’s self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take such direct forms as verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion” (589). I have chosen to use this term because it offers the most comprehensive definition of girls’ aggressive interactions with each other.

Though some researchers still differ on the correct name for this behavior, all agree that it has devastating effects on girls. Our culture, on the other hand, tends to trivialize girls’ fights, imagining them as merely petty squabbles which result in nothing more than one girl issuing another a short-lived prohibition from attending
her next birthday party (Brown 1). Indeed, popular movies, books, and T.V. shows such as Mean Girls, The Clique, and Gossip Girl have sensationalized and normalized girls’ fights, reworking them as a humorous rite of passage and suggesting that in years to come, girls will look back on their high school antics and laugh. One such film ends with a montage of scenes in which the girls from the former power clique engage in comical activities while the protagonist explains, “all the drama from last year just wasn’t important anymore” (Mean Girls). However, for most girls affected by social aggression, this is far from an accurate depiction of their experience. One woman described the lasting effects of social aggression, saying, “it’s not gone away, and it’s been twenty years. It’s never gone away. I’m the most insecure person in the whole world” (Simmons 229). In a qualitative study by Laurence Owens, another girl reported that vicious rumors and social exclusion had made eighth grade “the worst year in [her] whole life” (“Guess What” 367). Certain their torment will never end, and that other girls will be too afraid to help them, many “consider suicide as an option to end their suffering” (“Guess What” 367). In a wide range of studies on social aggression, girls report feeling overwhelming pain, fear, and anxiety, including a debilitating loss of confidence in themselves and in future relationships.3 While the psychological and sometimes life-threatening harm associated with social aggression is every bit as real for boys as it is for girls, I have limited the scope of this paper to girls’ behavior because research has shown that girls consistently use social aggression more than their male counterparts, whose conflicts are generally characterized by direct or physical aggression.4

So can state policies help schools prevent social aggression? Several researchers are wary of this approach to the problem because they have found that schools vary in the degree to which they implement state policies or use state publications (Temkin 6). However, importantly, one of these researchers noted that the lack of implementation was likely due to “noticeably loose language in the law and the challenges then inherent in interpreting the intent” (LaRocco, Nestler-Rusack, and Freiberg 20). This explanation “seemed particularly apparent” when principals were asked to define a certain phrase found in the anti-bullying law and the responses varied greatly. In other words, it appears that the lack of implementation is not intrinsic to anti-bullying law but rather arises from its ambiguous language. Furthermore, other researchers have found that school anti-bullying policies do

3 For further information on the devastating effects of social aggression see Owens; Svahn and Evaldsson; Johnston, and Simmons’s Odd Girl Speaks Out.

4 For a review of studies done on gender differences in expression of aggression, see Underwood 149-150.
closely follow those of the state (Stuart-Cassel, Ariana Bell, and Springer 80). For example, in one South Florida school district, the anti-bullying policy matched the state policy almost exactly, even “copying the state model policy verbatim for several items” (Richman 234). While it appears that state policy is more influential in some cases than in others, the magnitude of the problems caused by bullying requires serious consideration of every avenue that has “potential to influence the policies and practices of local school districts and individual schools” (Limber and Small 446). Thus, focusing on California as a case study, I will carefully examine the way this state’s anti-bullying laws, policies, and publications tackle social aggression. My evaluation of the state’s policies will be based on what the major researchers in this field have found to be the necessary components of any program that aims to diminish girls’ use of social aggression.5

“GIRLS WILL BE GIRLS”: THE CASE FOR EXPOSING THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL AGGRESSION

While California anti-bullying policies discuss the relationship between societal expectations and boys’ use of physical aggression, they neglect to reveal the cultural roots of social aggression; this omission perpetuates the belief that social aggression is inherent to girls and, consequently, has detrimental implications for both girls’ and teachers’ behavior. When Lawrence Owens asked teenage girls in Australia why they gossip and “bitch” about each other, they often replied that they simply “cannot help” themselves (“Victimization” 233). Rather than dismiss this response as a petty excuse, we must consider the immense challenge it poses to the prevention of social aggression. Any attempt to diminish this behavior will have to begin with convincing girls that their sex does not determine the way they express anger. As it is, girls have no reason to believe that social aggression is not inherent to them; they see other girls exhibiting this behavior on a daily basis, and popular media consistently showcases girls backstabbing each other.6 One teacher’s disparaging comment to Owens that girls model their behavior “on the soaps” may have more validity than he realizes (“Victimization” 224); in an interview with Brown, a fifteen-year-old

5 Based on their extensive research into the causes of this behavior and current schools’ attempts at dealing with it, several researchers have written plans to help schools attend to this issue, including “The Road Ahead” in Simmons’ Odd Girl Out, “This Book is an Action” in Brown’s Girlfighting, and “How to Intervene” in Underwood’s Social Aggression Among Girls. I will evaluate state policies by comparing them to the programs that these researchers have deemed necessary for combating social aggression. These components will be mentioned throughout my paper as I discuss California state policy’s inclusion of them.

6 See Brown’s Introduction.
girl explained, “TV, media, newspapers, it's like they teach girls you're supposed to fight” (18). Girls' everyday experiences with other girls and with the media thus act to normalize their use of social aggression and persuade them that this is simply what girls do.

Furthermore, the notion that social aggression is inherent to girls encourages teachers to ignore this behavior in the classroom. One deputy principal told Owens that “it's part of their psyche, part of their make-up…. They're just born that way” (235). Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold found that teachers tend to pass over behavior that is considered “normal” for girls and boys and instead identify and punish as bullying “that which transgresses normative performances of young masculinity and femininity” (577). In other words, a girl who openly acknowledges her anger at another student might be punished by her teacher because she expresses her aggression in a direct, “masculine” way, whereas a girl who gossips would be disregarded because she is merely engaging in standard “feminine” behavior. Thus, girls limit expressions of anger to the covert, indirect forms of social aggression to evade being punished by their teachers. Exposing the cultural origins of this behavior will help convince teachers that it is avoidable, and therefore worth trying to prevent.

In order to persuade girls and teachers that females do not suffer from a genetic disposition towards rumor spreading and social exclusion, researchers have concluded that we must “unveil the dynamics at play,” and help girls understand the way their behavior is engineered by “the pressures and limitations imposed on girls who do not comply with feminine ideals” (Brown 201; 208).

One of the foundational California anti-bullying publications, Bullying at School, starts off in the right direction by placing a discussion of the relationship between cultural norms and bullying in a prominent position under the heading “Gender and Bullying” (9). Importantly, the authors note that “expectations of behaviors based on gender…still exist for both girls and boys” and “being perceived as outside these standards may be costly to students developing self-concepts” (9). In the paragraph that follows this introduction, however, the authors limit their application of this theory to the interaction between boys and cultural norms, describing the “boy code” that “interferes with boys’ ability to effectively communicate” and mentioning the damaging effects of the “‘masculine’ expectations of what a man should be” (10). Instead of following this valuable analysis of the social norms that restrict boys’ behavior with a similar one for girls, this section then concludes with two sentences explaining that “girls often demonstrate great cruelty in more subtle forms of harassment” (10);
several examples of this behavior are then listed. This brief description of the ways girls generally bully does not further the understanding that social aggression is rooted in cultural norms. In fact, when seen in contrast to the full paragraph discussing the societal causes of boys’ aggression, the absence of any discussion of the cultural causes underpinning social aggression does more to perpetuate the idea that this behavior is innate to girls than to debunk that misconception.

Furthermore, in a “Frequently Asked Questions” sheet based on this publication, the authors encourage community members to “share positive cultural perspectives, norms, and expectations as models for youths” (“Bullying Frequently Asked Questions”). This suggestion is questionable because of the problematic nature of many of our seemingly “positive” cultural expectations and norms for girls, such as that they should always be “nice” and never express aggression (Ringrose 587).7 The authors here propose that aspects of our culture might be used to tackle the issue of social aggression, even though researchers on social aggression have almost unanimously condemned our culture as the cause of this behavior.

Another publication by the California Department of Education, “Getting Results: Update 4,” explains the state’s approach to developing anti-bullying programs and, in doing so, offers insight as to why state policies do not discuss the origins of social aggression. According to the state, we must analyze “the function(s) that bullying serves” in order to create “targeted interventions” (20). Recognizing the “need for control over others” as the primary purpose of bullying, the authors suggest that anti-bullying programs should include confidence-building activities (21). While researchers on social aggression fully agree that this is an essential component of any anti-bullying program, they argue that other approaches are also vital for developing strategies to decrease social aggression (Simmons 231). According to them, we must consider not only what function bullying serves, but also why girls bully the particular way they do. Only when we have acknowledged that girls engage in social aggression because our society restricts their expressions of anger will we be able help them deal with conflict in a healthier way. This approach will lead to more specific strategies such as “encourag[ing] girls to embrace respectful acts of assertion and provid[ing] them with representations of female aggression that are neither sensationalized nor the stuff of fantasy” (Simmons 231). Thus the state must diversify its approach to the problem of bullying or risk overlooking critical facets of the solution to social aggression.

7 See Ringrose pg. 587 for an extensive list of studies corroborating her claim that the cultural expectations for girls are that they always be “nice.”
HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOSSIP AND WHY WE SHOULD TRY: TRAINING FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Researchers consider teachers to be “one of our best hopes” for diminishing the use of social aggression (Simmons 225); when appropriately informed, their actions and words have proven instrumental in limiting this behavior (Leadbeater 590). Unfortunately, many of them are unable to recognize it in the classroom and, furthermore, do not understand how serious and damaging it is (Simmons 226-230). For these reasons, Brown and others have stated that an effective anti-bullying policy must include “teacher education on alternative forms of aggression,” including training on how to “spot and understand” them (215). After reviewing the research done on teachers’ ability to identify social aggression and their perceptions of its potential to harm, I will explain how California has failed to address these issues in their anti-bullying policies.

While the nature of overt, or direct, aggression makes it easy to identify (Simmons 227), as discussed above, many teachers find it very difficult to distinguish the diverse and subtle mechanisms that girls employ against one another.8 One teacher interviewed by Simmons explained, “we’re not trained to look for that” (227). The challenge teachers face in attempting to detect these behaviors is exemplified in Johanna Svahn and Ann-Carita Evaldsson’s unique ethnography of several middle school girls in Sweden, which exposes the subtleties of peer exclusion. In one anecdote from their study, two girls, Elena and Josefin, chatter about their favorite childhood pets (13). When a third girl, Natalie, tells a story about Max, her hamster, the other girls fall silent, staring at her blankly. Looking for support, Natalie says, “you can ask Linnea yourself” (13). Linnea, standing near Natalie, acts as if she does not remember this story. As Elena and Josefin begin speaking again, Linnea changes position to place herself by them, rather than by Natalie (14). The benign nature of their conversation about favorite pets belies the more serious way in which the group of girls excluded Natalie by “neglecting a shared history” and “bodily disaligning” themselves from her (13). Svahn and Evaldsson emphasize the subtlety of these tactics by explaining that the girls’ processes of exclusion “were not apparent at first glance” (4); they only became clear after reviewing the video recordings of the girls several times.

Even when teachers do happen to catch social aggression, many are likely to dismiss it because of the mistaken belief that this behavior is trivial and harmless in comparison

8 See Crick, Casas, and Nelson 99; Brown 215; Simmons 250; O’Neil 14.
to direct aggression (Temkin 6). In a study done on teachers’ reactions to different forms of aggression, Jina Yoon and Karen Kerber reported that “teachers view social exclusion less seriously, and are less likely to intervene than in cases of verbal and physical aggression” (32). Sheri Bauman and Adrienne Del Rio, in a similar vein, found that teachers “had less empathy for victims of relational bullying… and would take less severe actions toward relational bullies and victims than those involved in physical or verbal bullying” (225). These teachers’ reactions to social aggression are problematic because ignoring this behavior reinforces girls’ belief that it is a socially acceptable way of expressing aggression.

California state publications like “Bullying at School” do acknowledge the potential for teachers to limit bullying, noting that “teachers are the adults who interact the most with students” and, as such, “are powerful role models” (19). Furthermore, the state recognizes “the importance of considering more subtle forms of aggression,” and “how important it is that teachers prevent and stop not only overt aggression…but also relational aggression” (Safe and Healthy Kids Program Office 33; 16). However, despite this affirmation of the important role teachers play in decreasing bullying, the state never proposes any sort of education for teachers on how to recognize social aggression. Nor does it suggest explaining to teachers how serious and harmful this behavior is.

The absence of teacher education on social aggression is particularly alarming because California state policies and publications encourage schools to emulate the Olweus anti-bullying program, which depends almost entirely on teachers seeing and reacting to bullying (Counseling and Student Support Office 16). The influential founder of this program, Dan Olweus, has said that “it all boils down to a matter of will and involvement on the part of adults in deciding how much bullying should take place in our schools” (qtd. in Brown 199). While this approach might be effective for direct forms of aggression that are easily distinguishable by teachers and staff, it is unreasonable to expect that teachers will always be able to identify and stop a near-invisible behavior, especially one they have not been taught to recognize. For this reason, researchers on social aggression have criticized Olweus’s program for being too narrow and centered on direct aggression (Brown 200; O’Neil 29). The prominence of this program in California state policy suggests that it, too, is oriented around physical and direct forms of aggression. To ensure that their anti-bullying policy is equally effective for social aggression, the state will have to include teacher education on this behavior as well as specific strategies for dealing with it.
DON’T “STOP AND THINK”: RESPONDING TO SOCIAL AGGRESSION

In 2002, following a series of tragic school shootings in the 1990’s, the U.S. Secret Service issued a report that named bullying as the underlying cause of this violence (Vossekuil). In response, 120 bills were passed by state legislatures between 1999 and 2010 that created school bullying policies (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, and Springer xi). Given that the bullying that triggered these shootings was largely direct aggression, the programs that states developed for dealing with bullying focused on this behavior and many states have only minimally altered their anti-bullying policies since creating them (Richman 232). While California, along with twenty-eight other states, has changed its definition of bullying to accommodate social aggression (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, and Springer 26), it has yet to include specific strategies for dealing with this behavior.

Assuming that techniques originally designed for dealing with direct aggression will also be effective in diminishing social aggression is dangerous because they can actually elicit higher levels of social aggression. For example, the “stop and think” strategy is widely used to discourage impulsive bullies from acting out of anger and physically harming other children; however, this same approach does little good for girls who engage in social aggression and are already much too proficient at suppressing their anger to take out their revenge later through gossip and social exclusion (Underwood 214). Telling them to “think” some more may only encourage girls to internalize their anger rather than address it openly.

For this reason, the most extensive and well-intentioned anti-bullying policies and programs can actually exacerbate the problem of social aggression if they are not carefully created with this behavior in mind. For example, after implementing an anti-bullying program of their own creation at four schools, researchers Peter Smith and Mike Eslea found that boys’ aggression had decreased in all of the schools, whereas in three out of four of them, girls actually exhibited increased aggression. The researchers concluded that “efforts must be made to ensure that anti-bullying work is not skewed by a male stereotype of bullying behavior, and that it properly reflects and addresses the problems experienced by girls, and especially the nature of indirect bullying” (217). In their study of thirty-four schools’ anti-bullying policies, Sarah Woods and Dieter Wolke reached similar conclusions after finding that children reported more problems with social aggression in schools that had “more detailed and comprehensive policies, compared to schools which had less
thorough policies” (396). Supporting Eslea and Smith, they deduced that “anti-bullying policies and whole-school interventions may be failing to consider the problem of relational bullying, and placing exclusive emphasis on direct bullying behaviour only” (396). This explanation is further supported by the number of recent studies demonstrating that programs designed to deal with social aggression do significantly diminish its prevalence in schools (Leff et al., Nixon and Werner; Cappella and Weinstein).

Providing teachers with specific strategies for dealing with social aggression is particularly important because research suggests that current techniques may only be reinforcing this behavior. For example, several researchers have found that teachers tend to “resolve” girls’ conflicts by stressing the importance of their friendship, implying that friends do not fight (Ringrose and Renold 587; Yoon and Kerber 32). This practice reinforces girls’ false belief that direct conflict ends relationships (Simmons 31), and thereby encourages them to continue expressing in indirect and covert ways the occasional feelings of frustration and anger that are normal to any friendship. Without feasible ways of working out their conflicts, girls may find that “a minor disagreement can call an entire relationship into question” (Simmons 31). Yet despite the importance of teaching girls how to resolve conflicts with their friends, a recent study found that California school psychologists rated “friendship interventions” as one of the least important strategies for dealing with bullying (O’Malley 50). In light of girls’ distorted views about friendship and conflict, however, such interventions may in reality be one of the most important ways of addressing social aggression.

One California state publication, “Getting Results: Update 4,” acknowledges that “most prevention efforts are on overt forms of aggressive behavior. However, more subtle forms of aggression, such as relational aggression, have a significant impact on children’s adjustment, particularly for girls, and should be considered” (74). Recognizing that different strategies are necessary for direct and social aggression is an extremely important step towards creating effective anti-bullying policies. However, this solitary statement is obscured and contradicted by the rest of this and other California publications, which only present “anti-bullying strategies” and never differentiate between techniques more effective for one type of aggression than another. For example, in “Bullying at School,” the state promotes the strategy of “positive adult involvement” (3). As discussed above, there is much potential for adults and teachers to create environments that do not support social aggression; however, state publications leave schools and teachers without any hint as to what
that involvement looks like and how it might be different for diverse forms of aggression. To improve its leadership in this area, the state will need to provide schools with specific strategies for dealing with social aggression and alter its language so as to make clear that not all strategies are equally effective for different forms of aggression.

CONCLUSION

There’s a little part of me that will never quite trust [girls]. There’s a little part of me that believes they will turn on me at any moment. –Marcy, late 20s (qtd. in Simmons 270)

While individual researchers such as Simmons have done much to expose “the hidden culture of aggression in girls,” state anti-bullying laws and policies, with their broader scale of influence, have the potential to begin deconstructing the restrictions our society places on girls’ emotions to create communities “prepared to value all of girls’ feelings and not just some” (15; 270). In order to truly diminish the prevalence of this behavior, states will have to do more than call it bullying; they will have to publicly acknowledge the cultural origins of social aggression, provide education for teachers on how to recognize it and how harmful it is, and modify anti-bullying policies so as to include strategies designed specifically for dealing with this behavior. Ignoring these critical components of any plan meant to diminish social aggression will prolong the suffering and anguish girls and women feel as they engage in “halfhearted, unsatisfying forms of communication, that…do not satiate the universal human need to express anger” (Simmons 231). The state’s goal, then, should not so much be seen as regulating a cruel behavior, but as teaching girls to speak a language that they have previously been denied.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A

A NEW LANGUAGE FOR GIRLS: DIRECTIONS FOR CALIFORNIA STATE POLICY

By including social aggression in their definition of bullying, California state policies and publications have taken an important step towards creating “a shared public language to address girls’ conflicts and relationships” (Simmons 261). However, it is clear that this simple modification of an anti-bullying policy designed for diminishing direct aggression will not give schools the guidance they need to deal with this complicated and harmful behavior. Below is a summarized list of the steps discussed above that California must take to truly address this behavior.

1) Debunk the myth that this behavior is innate to girls by explaining its origins in our society's construction of the “nice” girl who never feels angry.

   a. This will prevent girls from engaging in this behavior out of the belief that they are genetically unable to refrain from it.
   b. Knowing that this behavior is not innate, and therefore avoidable, will help convince teachers to do what they can to stop it.

2) Provide workshops for teachers where they can learn how to recognize social aggression and how harmful it is.

   a. Teachers can be very effective at limiting this behavior if they understand its serious nature and know how to identify it.

3) Alter anti-bullying policies and programs to include strategies specifically for social aggression and differentiate between these and techniques meant for direct aggression.

   a. A number of researchers have provided detailed lists of strategies for dealing with social aggression. These include:

      i. Teach girls to immediately interrupt spiteful gossip. Research has shown that if the first girl to respond to another girl's gossip speaks positively, the conversation tends to continue in a positive trend; however, if the first response is negative, the conversation tends to continue in a negative trend, regardless of any subsequent positive
ii. Offer assertiveness training that urges girls to display courage in everyday interactions with other girls (Underwood 223).

iii. Work with girls to help them become comfortable with healthy expressions of anger and frustration (Simmons 231). Role-playing exercises may be one way to do this (248).

iv. Teach girls from early on that social aggression is just as wrong as kicking and punching. Many girls mistakenly believe that going behind someone’s back is the “nice” thing to do (Simmons 250).

v. Encourage girls to discuss this behavior with teachers and counselors and assure them that it will not be trivialized or dismissed as inconsequential (Simmons 250; Brown 200).

vi. Facilitate classroom discussions about different forms of aggression (Simmons 250).

vii. Create opportunities for girls to feel powerful and important, whether that be through participating in school clubs, or taking part in a discussion forum concerning school climate (Brown 228).

viii. Help girls develop media literacy and question society’s ideal girl (Brown 208).

ix. Reduce the competitive nature of the school climate (Underwood 219).


c. It is important to note that these researchers have no intention of focusing anti bullying policies uniquely on social aggression; it is just as important that these policies address physical and direct aggression.

While ongoing research will provide more concrete answers for states as to the best methods of decreasing this behavior, these three steps will do much to help the state balance its policies so that it addresses social aggression as responsibly as direct aggression.
“Where the Wild Things Should Be: Healing Nature Deficit Disorder Through the Schoolyard” is a research-based proposal for action. Charlotte’s essay provides an original solution to a problem first defined by journalist Richard Louv in 2008: nature deficit disorder posits that many children of the developed world are alienated from nature. The documented results of this disorder can be dire and include poor health, including depression, obesity, and diminished cognitive capacity; impoverished ecological knowledge; and limited engagement with environmental activism. To mitigate this disorder, Charlotte proposes a transformation of the schoolyard, a space foundational to global childhood and one commonly recognized as an asphalt desert. Designed with adult needs in mind, schoolyards today are equipment dominated to allow children to “blow off steam” and hard scaped to facilitate monitoring.

Writing with confidence and imagination, and drawing on extensive reading in geography, science education, and biology, Charlotte envisions the schoolyard as a child-centered space in which environmental learning might occur. She proposes four tenets of Natural Schoolyard Design: integration of biodiversity, sensory stimulation, diversity of topography, and “loose parts”—such as sand, water, stones, leaves and sticks, which permit children to play inventively. Out of hardscapes, her essay urges, we might develop vibrant, engaging, natural environments. Her argument provocatively questions the opposition between nature and culture, demonstrating that man-made spaces such as the schoolyard can provide children crucial access to nature.

—Sarah Pittock
The developed world deprives children of a basic and inalienable right: unstructured outdoor play. Children today have substantially less access to nature, less free range, and less time for independent play than previous generations had. Experts in a wide variety of fields cite the rise of technology, urbanization, parental over-scheduling, fears of stranger-danger, and increased traffic as culprits. Even the environmental education movement is to blame, some argue, because it prioritizes abstraction over direct experiences in nearby nature.

A growing body of research from the United States, United Kingdom, Mexico, Germany, Canada, Australia, Norway, Japan, and Spain has confirmed that this trend is a legitimate and pervasive phenomenon, though varied in scope and degree. In 2008 journalist Richard Louv articulated the causes and consequences of children’s alienation from nature, dubbing it “nature deficit disorder.” Louv is not alone in claiming that the widening divide between children and nature has distressing health repercussions, from obesity and attention disorders to depression and decreased cognitive functioning. Its implications for the future of the environment are equally disturbing. “What is the extinction of a condor,” asks naturalist Robert Pyle, “to a child who has never seen a wren?” (147). The dialogue surrounding nature deficit disorder deserves the attention and action of educators, health professionals, parents, developers, environmentalists, and conservationists alike.

This staggering rift between children and nature is not insurmountable. Experts have proposed solutions at the level of family and nation. The most practical and the most feasible solution offered, and the one on which this paper will center, involves
the schoolyard. The schoolyard habitat movement, which promotes the “greening” of school grounds, is quickly gaining international recognition and legitimacy. A host of organizations, including the National Wildlife Federation, American Forest Foundation, Council for Environmental Education, Britain-based Learning through Landscapes, Canadian-based Evergreen, and Swedish-based Skolans Uterum, have committed themselves to this express cause. However, while many recognize the need for “greened school grounds,” not many describe such landscapes beyond using adjectives such as “lush,” “green,” and “natural.” The literature thus lacks a coherent research-based proposal that both asserts the power of “natural” school grounds and delineates what such grounds might look like.

My research strives to fill in this gap. I establish a theoretical framework for dealing with children’s geography, advocate for the schoolyard as the perfect place to address nature deficit disorder, demonstrate the benefits of greened schoolyards, and establish the tenets of natural schoolyard design in order to further the movement and inspire future action.

CHILDREN, GEOGRAPHY, AND NATURE: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nature is a term notoriously difficult to define but essential for the purposes of this discussion. A common definition of nature can be found in the Cambridge Dictionary: “All the animals, plants, rocks, etc. in the world and all the features, forces and processes that happen or exist independently of people, such as the weather, the sea, mountains, reproduction and growth” (“Nature”). The Cambridge Dictionary reflects a widespread understanding of nature, which holds terrain even minimally designed by humans as inherently “unnatural.” This definition fails to account for the nature present in environments that have been influenced by humankind, such as national parks, farms, and preserves. A better approach would be to view all geographies upon a continuum of human design, from the untouched wild to the highly landscaped (Carver, Evans, and Fritz 25). My argument will rest on the assumption that nature, as the Cambridge Dictionary defines it, can be integrated into human-designed environments such as the schoolyard; human intervention and nature are not mutually exclusive.

Another assumption central to this research concerns biophilia, or our inherent affinity for living things. Since E.O. Wilson put forth his biophilia hypothesis in 1984, numerous studies have corroborated his claim: our evolutionary heritage has instilled
within us the desire to connect with other forms of life. This affinity for nature is especially visible in children. Children have been shown to prefer natural settings for their play. Furthermore, their behavior in nature, such as seeking shelters and hideaways, is shaped by innate primal instincts (Heerwagon and Orians 52). Nature thus exerts a special psychological pull on children that must be nurtured and encouraged for healthy development.

A useful schema of children’s engagement with the natural world is proposed by architect Louise Chawla in her article “Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It” (see fig. 1). Through encounters with the environment, children progress in cycles of increasing competence and environmental knowledge (Chawla 69). Chawla’s cyclical model, when combined with Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis, highlights the indispensable role nature plays, or should play, in childhood.

![Fig. 1: Children progress in “positive interactive cycle” with the environment (Chawla 69).](image-url)

Any study of children and nature will inevitably overlap with ecological psychology, or the study of the relationship between individuals and their environment. The concept of affordances, a fundamental of ecological psychology, sheds light on the relationship between children and their geography. In 1979 psychologist James Gibson defined affordances as the “action possibilities” of an environment; in other words, what the environment offers the individual (127). A tree stump, for example,
might afford seating for a child, but only if it is free of splinters and the right height for that child’s body. The affordance of that tree stump depends on both the stump and the child. A school ground that meets the needs of its children must provide a diverse variety of affordances; thus it must be designed with children in mind.

The model of children as both subjects and agents of their geographies will inform my research (Matthews and Limb 68). While children do exert a measure of power and control over their environments, their agency is limited. For example, a child cannot single-handedly transform a concrete lot into a grassy knoll. Children are, to a certain extent, subjects of their geographies and the society that defines what those geographies might be. In a 1987 study of children’s place and behavior, Paul Gump coined the term “setting coercivity” to convey the profound influence that an ecological setting exerts on a child’s actions. A number of other studies have shown that the nature of the schoolyard shapes the nature of play (Titman; Moore, “Before and After Asphalt”; Moore and Wong). The schoolyard is therefore a land rife with potential, with the power to facilitate children’s free play in nature. Schoolyard design must acknowledge children’s dual role as both subjects and agents by providing the raw materials for natural play; children will then manipulate these materials as agents to suit their needs.

ASPHALT DESERTS: THE STATE OF THE SCHOOLYARD TODAY

As a formative geography of childhood, the schoolyard serves as the perfect place to address nature deficit disorder. Historian Peter Stearns argues that modern childhood was transformed when schooling replaced work as the child’s main social function (1041). In this contemporary context, the schoolyard emerges as a critical setting for children’s learning and play. The school playground, according to British psychologist Peter Blatchford, is a child-empowering geography. “Breaktime is one of the few occasions,” he explains, “when [children’s] play and social relations are more their own” (Blatchford 58). As parental traffic and safety concerns increasingly constrain children’s free range outside of school, the schoolyard remains a safe haven, a protected outdoor space just for children.

Despite the schoolyard’s major significance in children’s lives, the vast majority of schoolyards fail to meet children’s needs. An outdated theoretical framework is partially to blame. In his 1890 Principles of Psychology, psychologist Herbert Spencer championed the “surplus energy theory”: play’s primary function, according to
Spencer, was to burn off extra energy (White). Play, however, contributes to the social, cognitive, emotional, and physical growth of the child (Hart, “Containing Children” 136); “[l]etting off steam” is only one of play’s myriad functions. Spencer’s theory thus constitutes a serious oversimplification, but it still continues to inform the design of children’s play areas.

Most US playgrounds conform to an abiotic equipment-based model constructed implicitly on Spencer’s surplus energy theory (Frost and Klein 2). These play areas feature sports fields, asphalt courts, swing sets, and jungle gyms; they relegate nature to the sidelines. The standardized playground so prevalent in the US drastically limits children, prioritizing gross motor play at the expense of dramatic play or exploration. An eight-year-old in England says it best: “Tarmac and concrete is boring, like seeing a film ten times” (Titman 44). Another points out, “The space outside feels boring. There’s nothing to do. You get bored with just a square of tarmac” (Titman 42). Such an environment does not afford children the chance to graduate to new, more complex challenges as they develop (see Chawla’s model of child-environment interactions, fig. 1). While play equipment still deserves a spot in the schoolyard, equipment-dominated playscapes leave the growing child bereft of stimulating, novel interactions with the environment.

Also to blame for the failure of school grounds to meet children’s needs are educators’ and developers’ adult-centric aims. Schulman and Peters’s GIS analysis of urban schoolyard landcover in Baltimore, Boston, and Detroit affirms quantitatively what many already know: urban schoolyards are sterile environments with inadequate tree canopy and low biodiversity, dominated by synthetic landcovers such as tarmac, asphalt, and turf grass (Schulman and Peters 65; see fig. 2). While these landcovers may be more conducive to maintenance and supervision, they exacerbate the “extinction of experience,” a term that Pyle has used to describe the disappearance of children’s embodied, intuitive experiences in nature. Asphalt deserts are major instigators of this “cycle of impoverishment” (Pyle 312). Loss of biodiversity begets environmental apathy, which in turn allows the process of extinction to persist; deep alienation from nature ensues.

Furthermore, adults’ preference for manicured, landscaped grounds does little to enhance children’s creative outdoor play. Instead, as Australian geographers Malone and Tranter point out, “By over-designing and regulating schoolgrounds, schools are designing out the capacity for children to engage in natural environmental learning” (Malone and Tranter). Such highly ordered schoolyards are constructed with adults’
convenience in mind; instead of rich, stimulating play environments for children, they are “neat and safe compounds” devoid of nature (Matthews and Limb 69). Therefore, despite important progress made by the schoolyard habitat movement, most schoolyards still have far to go.

THE GREENER, THE BETTER: THE BENEFITS OF GREENED SCHOOL GROUNDS

A great body of research documents the cognitive, psychological, and physiological benefits of contact with nature. Health experts champion outdoor play as an antidote to two major trends in children of the developed world: the Attention Deficit Disorder and obesity epidemics. A 2001 study by Taylor, Kuo, and Sullivan indicates that green play settings decrease the severity of symptoms in children with ADD. They also combat inactivity in children by diversifying the “play repertoire” and providing for a wider range of physical activity than traditional playgrounds. In the war against childhood obesity, health advocates must add the natural schoolyard to their arsenal.

The schoolyard also has the ability to engineer relationships among children, nature, and play. Studies demonstrate that greener areas foster higher levels of creative play than barren spaces. Habitats of life, inexhaustible in their novelty, offer infinite variety and stimulation. Instead of being prescribed a play structure with a clear purpose (e.g. a swing set), children in natural schoolyards must discover
the affordances of their environment—they must imagine what could be. While children do enjoy traditional play equipment, too often these structures come to dominate the landscape. Sensory-rich environments, on the other hand, afford children “graduated challenges”—they grow with the child (Chawla 68).

In general, children exhibit more prosocial behavior and higher levels of inclusion in the natural schoolyard (Dyment 31). Landscape architects Herrington and Studtmann offer a compelling explanation for this phenomenon. They argue that in a schoolyard dominated by a grass monoculture and traditional playground equipment, social hierarchy is determined by physical prowess, while in a schoolyard with vegetative areas, where children are more apt to engage in creative play, the hierarchy develops based on linguistic and imaginative ability (Herrington and Studtmann 203). A 2006 questionnaire-based study of a greening initiative in Toronto found that the naturalization of the school grounds indeed effected a decrease in aggressive actions and disciplinary problems and a corresponding increase in civility and cooperation (Dyment 28). The greened schoolyard offers benefits beyond physical and mental health; it shapes the character and quality of children’s play interactions.

The schoolyard also has the potential to shape the relationship between children and the natural world. In the essay “Eden in a Vacant Lot,” Pyle laments the loss of vacant lots and undeveloped spaces in which children can play and develop intimacy with the land. When we develop these wild places, he argues, we rob children of the opportunity to develop natural literacy and intimacy through the spontaneous, intuitive experiences with nature that these grounds facilitate. However, Pyle overlooks the geography of schoolyards, which can serve as habitat pockets, enclaves of nature in an increasingly urbanized and developed world. Research has shown that school ground naturalization fosters nature literacy and intimacy just as Pyle’s vacant lots do. A 2012 case study of Forest School in Australia revealed positive influences of the natural schoolyard on children’s ecological knowledge (Ridgers, Knowles, and Sayers 49). A school ground greening program in Toronto also dramatically enhanced children’s environmental awareness, sense of stewardship, and curiosity about their local ecosystem (Dyment 37). When integrated with nature, the schoolyard can mitigate the effects of nature deficit disorder and reawaken children’s innate biophilia.

A less measurable but still significant benefit of the natural schoolyard is child empowerment. The natural schoolyard affords children more liberty to engage in
play of their own invention. In a study of Australian primary schools, geographers Malone and Tranter remark, “In natural or un-designed spaces, structure and permanency are reduced to a minimum, which allows the environment to be flexible in the hands of the children” (Malone and Tranter). With minimal structural design, children will actively construct their own relationship with the natural environment. Involvement of children in the greening initiative itself, whether through designing, planning, or gardening, also boosts their self-esteem (Dyment 27). Moreover, when teachers recognize and utilize the schoolyard as an outdoor classroom, children can shift from being knowledge consumers into being knowledge generators. Natural school grounds thus restore agency to children.

BIOPHILIC DESIGN: ESTABLISHING THE TENETS OF NATURAL SCHOOLYARD DESIGN

The need for naturalized schoolyards is urgent. But how might theory actually translate into reality? Here I will propose four principles of biophilic schoolyard design, or landscaping that aims to integrate nature and natural systems into the man-made geography of the schoolyard.

The first is biodiversity. Schools should strive to incorporate a wide range of greenery and wildlife on their grounds. Trees, bushes, flowers, long grasses, and a garden,
weather permitting, all deserve a place in the schoolyard (see fig. 3). Native plants should figure prominent in the landscape so as to inspire children’s interest in their local habitats. (One word of caution: avoid poisonous or sharp plants and possible choking hazards, especially in schoolyards for the very young.) Inclusion of wildlife in school grounds can foster meaningful interactions with other species. Certain plants and flowers, for example, attract birds, butterflies, and other insects; aquatic areas can house fish, frogs, tadpoles, and pond bugs. School pets and small-scale farms also serve to teach children important lessons about responsibility, respect, and compassion for animals (see fig. 4). Biodiversity, the most vital feature of biophilic design, transforms former “asphalt deserts” into realms teeming with life.

The second principle that schoolyard designers should keep in mind is sensory stimulation. The greater the degree of sensory richness in an environment, the more opportunities it affords the child to imagine, learn, and discover. School grounds should feature a range of colors, textures, sounds, fragrances, and in the case of the garden, tastes. Such sensory diversity almost always accompanies natural environments, but it helps to describe the natural schoolyard in opposition to a monoculture of grass, or worse, concrete, which afford comparatively little sensory stimulation.

Diversity of topography constitutes another dimension of quality in a greened schoolyard (Fjortoft and Sageie 83). The best school grounds afford children a
range of places to climb, tunnel, frolic, and sit. Natural elements function as play “equipment”: children can sit on stumps, jump over logs, swing on trees, roll down grassy mounds, and climb on boulders. Most importantly, the playscape should offer nooks and crannies for children to seek shelter and refuge (see fig. 5). Although such dens and hideaways increase the difficulty of supervision, they fulfill a basic biological impulse for safety and protection (Kirkby 7; Appleton 92). Educators must therefore compromise convenience for the sake of the children. While asphalt lots and play structures are still fun for children, they should not dominate the school grounds (see fig. 6 and 7). Once again, the greater the variety of topography, the more affordances the schoolyard provides to children.

Last but not least, naturalized schoolyards must embody the theory of loose parts proposed by architect Simon Nicholson. “In any environment,” he writes, “both the degree of inventiveness and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to the number and kinds of variables in it” (qtd. in Louv 87). Loose parts—sand, water, leaves, nuts, seeds, rocks, and sticks—are abundant in the natural world. The detachability of loose parts makes them ideal for children’s construction projects. While some might worry about the possible hazards of loose parts, more conventional play equipment is far from safe: more than 200,000 of children’s emergency room visits every year in the United States are linked to these built structures (Frost 217). When integrated into the schoolyard through naturalization, loose parts offer the child the chance to gain ever-increasing mastery of the environment. Their plasticity allows them to develop with the child.
The four tenets proposed provide a concrete framework for the application of biophilic design to the schoolyard. Biophilic design of schoolyards, however, also requires a frame-shift. Children see and use land differently from adults, especially with regards to vacant lots and empty ground (Matthews and Limb 78). Developers and educators need to resolve the contradiction between adult preferences for well-manicured grounds and children's needs for wilder spaces that can be constructed, manipulated, and changed through play (Lester and Maudsley 67; White and

Fig. 6 and 7: Peninsula School in Menlo Park has integrated traditional equipment, such as a playhouse and slide, into the natural setting.
Boothe Prize Essays 2012-2013

Stoecklin). Schoolyards designed according to the precepts of biodiversity, sensory stimulation, diversity of topography, and loose parts will go a long way in healing the rift between children and nature, a rift that adult-centric design only widens.

GROUNDS FOR CHANGE

In conclusion, we have shown that natural schoolyard design can heal nature deficit disorder by restoring free outdoor play to children’s lives in the developed world. The four principles of biophilic schoolyard design challenge the conventional notion that natural and man-made landscapes are mutually exclusive. Human-designed environments, and especially those for children, should strive to integrate nature into the landscape. All schools should be designed with the four tenets of natural schoolyard design in mind.

Though such sweeping change may seem impractical given limitations on school budgets, greening initiatives that use natural elements, minimal equipment, and volunteer work can be remarkably cost-effective. Peninsula School in Menlo Park, California, has minimized maintenance costs through the inclusion of hardy native species; it is essentially “designed for neglect” (Dyment 44). Gardens and small-scale school farms can also become their own source of funding, as they have for Ohlone Elementary School in Palo Alto, California. Ultimately, the cognitive, psychological, physiological, and social benefits of natural school grounds are priceless. In the words of author Richard Louv, “School isn’t supposed to be a polite form of incarceration, but a portal to the wider world” (Louv 226). With this in mind, let us embrace the schoolyard as a land “richly simmered in promise” (Pyle 306) and restore to children their exquisite intimacy with nature: their inheritance, their right.
WORKS CITED


FALL 2012 WINNER

Kat Gregory

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

“Six million people are under correctional supervision in the U.S.—more than were in Stalin’s gulags,” writes Adam Gopnik in “The Caging of America.” At the same time, Americans’ love of romantic outlaws like Bonnie and Clyde, Jesse James and more recently, the Barefoot Bandit, continues.

Wondering about this seeming paradox, Kat Gregory began “The Virtue of Vice and the Vice of Virtue: The Rhetoric of Criminality” interested in how Colton Harris-Moore, aka the Barefoot Bandit, who had terrorized, or at the very least inconvenienced and annoyed, numerous residents of Camano Island in Washington, became a social media sensation with more than 70,000 Facebook fans. What made the 19-year-old’s stealing from vacation homes to his eventual commandeering of airplanes and boats so attractive to citizens of a country that incarcerates more humans than anywhere, at anytime, in the history of the developed world?

To get to the bottom of this, Gregory analyzed Jason Kersten’s post-arrest representation of the Barefoot Bandit in Rolling Stone Magazine. She argues that Kersten initially romanticizes Harris-Moore by painting him as a poor, resourceful, nonviolent kid whose “hell bent determination to fly . . . captured my imagination,” and, that of his largely young, White, male, adventure-loving audience. But this fascination wasn’t an anomaly. Rather, Gregory’s research revealed that the Barefoot Bandit fits within the longstanding academic conversation about “social bandits/outlaw heroes” like Robin Hood and Jesse James who were believed to be “political symbols” by the poor who supported their challenging the authority of the rich.

However, while Harris-Moore was obviously taking from the rich, Gregory asks whether, and if so, how, the meaning and purpose of the outlaw’s crimes have changed. Finding little evidence of a motivating political ideology, Gregory posits a consumption model instead. And, in so doing, she illuminates the costly effects of glamorizing “bandits” and incarcerating “criminals” to satisfy a taste for vicarious thrills in an age of boredom and ubiquitous Internet access.

—Donna Hunter
In an honest service there is thin commons, low wages and hard labor. In [piracy], plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power... No, a merry life and a short one shall be my motto. Damnation to him who ever lived to wear a halter.

—Black Bartholomew Roberts (qtd. in Parker 46)

In the summer of 2010, a serial burglar charged with at least three million dollars of damaged property was apprehended by the authorities and led away in shackles. The thief’s name was Colton Harris-Moore, yet the nineteen year old was better known as the “Barefoot Bandit.” And he certainly was known. As his petty vacation home raids evolved into grand theft of airplanes and high-speed chases in a cross-country journey, the dramatic nature of his crimes and the panache with which he worked left their mark on the public. During the two years he was on the run, residents of his native Camano Island community in Washington begged for his capture and frustrated federal agents were thwarted in their attempts to bring Harris-Moore to justice. At the same time, TIME Magazine dubbed him “America’s Most Wanted Teenage Bandit,” shops sold T-shirts emblazoned with the message, “Fly, Colton, Fly!” and over seventy thousand Facebook fans eagerly lauded his every move.

Harris-Moore and other outlaws disregard their fellow man’s life, liberty, and property in clear violation of the law. Despite this, perhaps because of it, society raises some of them to the status of treasured celebrity. Why? To investigate this fascinating phenomenon, I will first examine current explanations for the popularity of the outlaw figure. Next, I will take a closer look at how media consumerism has
changed this traditional relationship between the bandit and his fans and explore the consequences of this shift for how we justify separating outlaws from everyday criminals. I will then look at how this separation fails to translate perfectly into an ambiguous world when pressing, violent crimes throw our construction of banditry into sharp relief. Ultimately, I hope to shed light upon how the subjective reality of our experiences and expectations influences our judgments about criminals by showing that there is less of a distinction between black and white, right and wrong, good and evil, and truth and fiction, than we might like to believe.

THE SOCIAL BANDIT

The traditional ‘noble robber’ represents an extremely primitive form of social protest, perhaps the most primitive there is. He is an individual who refuses to bend his back, that is all. —Eric Hobsbawm

If the “Barefoot Bandit” was a very real criminal to those directly affected by his thievery, how and why did he become a hero for thousands of distant fans? What separates this romanticized desperado from the hooded villain we dread meeting on the street? The social bandit is an elusive figure who refuses to be contained either by bars or by simple explanations. While glamorized legends from the gallant Robin Hood to the pioneering Jesse James have embellished the pages of history throughout time, scholarly attention only recently turned to the analysis of this ambiguous, lawless figure. Eric Hobsbawm, an influential British Marxist historian, was the first to study banditry’s societal and historical context instead of dismissing it as unpredictable rebellion. His conviction that the bandit could be seen “as a worthwhile subject for understanding society” forms the fundamental premise of all other research in this domain, including my own, because it assumes the common themes of outlaw stories can expose us to truths about our culture and worldview (Kheng qtd. in West 13).

Hobsbawm coined the term “social bandit” in 1959, which refers to “peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within the peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champion, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported” (13). These social bandits, Hobsbawm argues, crop up when times of turbulence and stress hit agricultural societies of oppressed peasants. The key feature that distinguishes the anti-hero from a common criminal is that he earns the support of this lower class in a primitive form of proletarian protest.
In Hobsbawm’s model, social banditry is a phenomenon whose existence is limited to the agrarian cultures of the past, a phenomenon that “modern society has killed” because modernization has eliminated the rural peasant (19). However, other scholars and I take issue with Hobsbawm’s conclusion that lionized outlaws are doomed to be figures of the past because this logic constricts the study of outlaws to a kind of historical extravagance and neglects the critical insight they provide on the state of society today. Although Hobsbawm argues that the modern era hands the police all the tools they need to prevent the bandit’s success, the technological advancements modernization brings to law enforcement do not pose a legitimate handicap because, as sociologist Paul Kooistra suggests, “modern weaponry and massive bureaucratic organization do not seem to be very effective against [the] guerrilla warfare tactics” to which criminals so often resort (220). Indeed, Kooistra argues, the criminal justice system actually seems to lag behind the technological proficiency of criminals because the system is often stuck “reacting to criminal innovations,” trying to catch up with the latest technology instead of leading the way (220). Further, because technology has led to mass media, it has created a niche for sensational stories that secures the continued prominence of bandit stories. Thus, examining the impact of outlaws remains relevant and revelatory.

However, although Hobsbawm defined what a social bandit is, his interpretation fails to explain the disparity between the legend of the social bandit and objective historical events. Why are outlaws, the Billy the Kids, John Dillingers, andPretty Boy Floyds of our folklore, glorified for stealing from the rich to give to the poor despite the reality that their humanitarian motives are more myth than fact? Kooistra explains that for an outlaw “to emerge from obscurity and become a national figure, large numbers of people must find some symbolic meaning in [the outlaw’s] criminality and identify with him rather that with his victim” (226). Identification from a broad audience elevates this ordinary criminal to hero status by manufacturing the historical details of his story into a legend that fits the social bandit mold.

The most fundamental level of this identification is cultural. The legends of these characters are framed, as Brad West points out, to tap into the universal mythological appeal of the trickster archetype, a “weak character who uses their cunning and wit to triumph over the strong” (8). The lives of social bandits possess various structural preconditions that align with this archetype to make them candidates for heroism, and our collective interpretation fills in the gaps to smooth over aspects of what actually happened that are incongruous with the trickster model.
However, it would be premature to decide that “violence would be ignored and swept under the rug simply because bandits are interesting,” so economists such as Nicholas Adam Curott and Alexander Fink assert that outlaw legends must unintentionally provide a net positive gain for the public when the authorities themselves are unjust (9). The centralized cost the bandit inflicts upon the victim, they argue, is offset by advantages dispersed to all the members of society who “derive benefits from seeing the political authority offended by bandits who break the laws it enforces” (17). Thus their trickery is not only intrinsically attractive, but also gains allure for the public because of collective resentment towards the victims or law enforcement. Our cherished bandits of old tended to have agrarian origins and became popular by targeting the alleged oppressors of farmers. It is no coincidence that late 19th century outlaws singled out the monopolistic organizations thought to exploit the lower class, like banks and railroads, while criminals during the Great Depression were nearly all bank robbers. For example, Bonnie and Clyde heartened the Depression-era poor by attacking banks perceived as oppressive.

Thus, under the existing model of thinking, when viewed in light of the 2007 recession, Colton Harris-Moore takes the stage as a metaphor of justice for the masses hard hit by the economic downturn. The “Barefoot Bandit” not only speaks to injustice in our government, he demonstrates that the general public must associate the victims of Harris-Moore’s theft with this exploitative system. Given that Harris-Moore often stole luxury status symbols such as planes and boats, this theory would link supporters’ responses with the same social unrest that spurred the Occupy Movement. When he stole from ordinary enterprises, then, the public still benefited from observing the law thwarted. However, while this makes logical sense in theory, we must be careful not to impose speculation if it does not fit with the evidence. Do the masses really like Harris-Moore because they think of him as a vehicle for justice, or is something else at play?

These current conversations about the social bandit phenomenon focus on how outlaws are presented to the public as political symbols of extra-legal justice during turbulent eras. But this is to ignore how our interactions with these criminals have been influenced by capitalism. While social bandit legends have served a vital function in the past by helping their audience to unify against unjust authority, has modern society’s emphasis on media and commodification affected what they represent to us now? To examine this question, I will explore whether bandits are still seen as political symbols or have come to mean something else.
THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA CONSUMERISM

[Commodified fantasy] proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great story-tellers are copied, stereotyped, reduced to toys, molded in bright coloured plastic, advertised, sold broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable. —Ursula Le Guin

In modern society, for all but the small percentage who also experience it directly, popular exposure to criminal activity stems from the media; thus it is important to examine how the media chooses to portray the legends that fascinate the public. To do so, we must consider how our emotions can be manipulated by rhetoric. Sympathy is an essential quality of human nature, but it is a limited asset and thus whom we sympathize with is influenced by the way in which the given situation is presented. When we see a news story, it is typically told from the perspective of the victim and law enforcement, so we feel anger and fear. However, when the media hand feeds us the perspective of the outlaw, we root for them over the sheriffs and victims because this perspective portrays these entities with a remoteness that acquits us of moral responsibility for their well-being.

In a fundamental sense, like so many institutions in capitalist culture, the press exists to create a profit – it exists to sell itself. The rise of mass media, particularly the Internet, has created, as Kooistra observes, a “steady need for the production of celebrities” that cements a niche for the manufacture of bandit legends because outlaw adventures sell, and authors are motivated to attempt to reap the profits guaranteed by the previously successful formula (220)\(^1\). However, the media on social bandits is only profitable so long as it successfully predisposes the audience to identify with the criminal over the victim. I wish to argue that this identification now stems not from the ideological resonance previously suggested but from the fact that the trickster is marketed to represent a life of adventure and freedom within a capitalist economy. The media in this case, Jeff Ferrell observes, uses the “manipulation of meaning and the seduction of the image” to “manufacture experiences of imagined

\(^1\) The purely fictional counterparts of bandits that star in movie and TV adventures, like their flesh and blood cousins in the physical world, are also portrayed to appeal to the public’s desire for entertainment. I choose to focus on the latter class in this essay because they present the opportunity to concretely demonstrate how reality is actively contorted.
indulgence” instead of scenarios of retributive justice (Ferrell 93). By following this “product,” an easy act in this Internet age, consumers feel like they have themselves vicariously gained adventure, rebellion, and freedom. And so, if a criminal has the right attributes at the right time and place and is chosen as a hero, the media capitalize upon his legend and quickly fit him into the adventurous role that the public craves. Thus, it is essential to understand how the media turns miscreants like Harris-Moore into products that individuals conditioned by capitalist values want to “buy into.”

The "Barefoot Bandit" in the Media

The case of the “Barefoot Bandit” was characterized by its widespread coverage on the Internet, and one writer in particular has been accused of glorifying and glamorizing the delinquent through his journalism. Jason Kersten's account concretely illustrates the construction of the social bandit in the capitalist age. Kersten, who had dramatized an earlier investigation of Harris-Moore's adventures, penned “The Airplane Thief” in response to his capture the day after it occurred. The fact that his story was published in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, which calls itself “the pulse of youth culture,” suggests that Kersten's story caters to white, young, middle class men who expect “bold stories […] delivered with energy, passion, irreverence” instead of impassive news reports and thus exemplify adventure consumers in the Internet age (“Media Kits”). The readers, who likely do not include the aging community on Camano Island that Harris-Moore violated, are predisposed to sympathize with the side that opposes perceived authorities. But is this sympathy rooted in a deep political identification or merely in the entertainment the account provides? As any astute writer does, Kersten crafts his piece to give his audience the story it desires, and thus the way in which he presents Harris-Moore will reveal the main selling points of outlaw stories today.

Kersten casts Harris-Moore as a manifestation of the trickster archetype by first emphasizing his liminal and delicate character and then focusing on his craftiness. He introduces the lawbreaker as a “troubled youth” and directs attention to his poignant story of childhood abuse and neglect. In addition, Kersten highlights Harris-Moore's peacefulness, his distaste for drugs, and his love of animals. In going so far as to explicitly define the young man as “about as far from a cold-hearted crook as one could get,” he draws us to the boy's innocence.

This unthreatening portrayal is layered with elements of the style of the classic trickster, namely defiance of authorities by means of escapes and disguises. Kersten
plays up Harris-Moore’s “plane thefts… boat thefts and foot chases in which he routinely outran police,” and because brute force is contrary to the trickster genre, Harris-Moore’s audacity and cleverness are emphasized over any cruel retribution. Kersten does not associate his subject with any violence and neglects to mention that he was armed when the police finally caught up with him. However, by relating how Harris-Moore stole his first airplane with his only flight experience being “the basics from the Internet,” Kersten highlights his wit, independence and ingenuity. Furthermore, the moniker “Barefoot Bandit” itself refers to the kid’s cheeky tendency to leave chalk footprints at the stores he looted to goad his pursuers. Accordingly, the audience construes Harris-Moore’s situation as one of a charismatic trickster’s courageous pranks.

Although Harris-Moore’s portrayal does appeal to our fascination with the trickster archetype, the article does not cast him as a political symbol. The words and escapades Kersten focuses on are presented in such a way as to consciously prevent the audience from dwelling on the illicit implications of his various adventures. Although Kersten refers to the young man as a thief, Harris-Moore is never labeled a “criminal” outright and is often called a “kid.” Harris-Moore is presented as a “nuisance” and a “strange bird with a knack for pleasing the crowd,” comparisons that downplay the destructive and felonious aspects of his case. He is even equated to Goldilocks, and the reference to the fairy tale reinforces the perception of the young man as a harmless and whimsical entity. But all of these designations fail to acknowledge the fact that Harris-Moore was a criminal. He broke the law and harmed many in the process. While Kersten admits his subject was a “nuisance to many” and speaks casually of “yet more burglaries,” nowhere in his tale is any mention of the “many,” the victims he notoriously terrorized, or of why they deserved this abuse. Aside from a single sentence on how Harris-Moore flippantly left a hundred dollars at a veterinary hospital, there are no implications about a just redistribution of wealth. If Harris-Moore was really being cast as a symbol for extralegal intervention, it would be important for Kersten to demonstrate how those he targeted were corrupt or oppressive, the enemies of his own followers. Instead, he does not actively mention the political nature of the crimes to the point of actively deflecting attention. Rolling Stone readers are likely to have high incomes and aspire to (if not already inhabit) the upper classes, thus too obviously critiquing the elite could reduce Harris-Moore’s entertainment value.

This emptiness of political meaning clashes with Curott and Fink’s claim that violence would not be ignored unless it had some value to society. If Harris-Moore’s
crimes do not help his fans to work through resentment of the privileged elite, what justifies their fame? The trickster archetype, like its manifestation as the Court Jester, is supposed to entertain, and thus Harris-Moore represents to Kersten’s readers not justice, but entertainment. While the article is ostensibly a news summary, it is infused with Kersten’s personal reactions, and because we are already disposed to accept and trust the narrator’s conversational and frank tone, his passionate expressions of admiration for the brazen thief indicate to the reader that this is the emotion they too should experience. He readily praises what he calls Harris-Moore’s “hell bent determination to fly that captured my imagination,” and admits that “however reckless that was, it is hard not to be amazed by his ingenuity and determination.” In drawing the parallel that “Like Colt, I too was obsessed with airplanes as a kid,” Kersten invites us to see our own latent ambitions of grandeur realized in Harris-Moore’s triumph. The diction he chooses sensationalizes Harris-Moore’s “ambitious spree[s],” his “usual flair,” and the thefts that are “nothing if not dramatic.” By acknowledging, “I’d be lying if I said there wasn’t a part of me that cheered each time he got away,” Kersten validates the reader’s own inclination to root for the underdog while at the same time helping to construct and perpetuate it. That Kersten’s characterization of Harris-Moore as a trickster is calculated to entertain and engage instead of delineate how the lawbreaker distributed justice demonstrates that our identification with an outlaw has become an antidote to the mundanity of our own lives, not to oppression.

This revelation implies low expectations for Kersten’s audience because it suggests that they are insensitive to themes of class struggle, that they care only for their own amusement. But in our incredibly superficial world, we do not have to care about more. So much of the time, we are not looking for something deeper. Some might still enjoy a private chuckle over how Harris-Moore stole from the rich, but for the most part, our thought process ends with the “Like” button on his Facebook fan page.

**Irony in Commoditying Resistance**

Writers like Kersten hook us on the idea that the outlaw is more than a petty criminal and that we should delight in his celebration. Yet, inherent to this phenomenon rests a contradiction that further demonstrates the shallow nature of the motives driving our support of outlaws. Returning to the epigraph that begins this section, Ursula Le Guin argues that commodified fantasy “proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity” and creates a situation where “profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe,” and nowhere is this
Program in Writing and Rhetoric  Kat Gregory

more apparent than in media about rebellion (qtd. in Parker 146). By integrating subversive figures into the mainstream, capitalism transforms resistance itself into a conformist commodity. It absorbs urban graffiti into mass-produced clothing lines, ghetto gang culture into hip-hop fads, and Harris-Moore’s thefts into magazine sales and an expensive “Fly, Colton, Fly” merchandise line. In doing so, it uses their image to support the very capitalist consumption model from which they are supposedly breaking away. Martin Parker, author of *Alternative Business: Outlaws, Crime and Culture*, points out that “Captain Jack Sparrow would probably raise a camp eyebrow at the” irony of the anti-piracy warnings Disney copied onto its *Pirates of the Caribbean* DVDs, but the masses who purchased the films have failed to notice or at least care about the incongruity (32). Parker notes, “this sort of cultural production is typical of the last century, with all my economic outlaws being exploited in pretty much every cultural medium,” which confirms that the commodification that has recently seized upon these subversive legends may be related to capitalism (29). The fact that we are unaware of or deliberately ignore this irony and continue to support anti-authoritarian symbols even as they are sold to us by established, respectable enterprises reflects that the role of bandit legends has shifted from a beneficial way to cope with perceived corruption to a consumerist indulgence—a way to love the adventure an outlaw represents without paying the price of being one.

THE LINE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

*Audiences know what to expect, and that is all that they are prepared to believe in.* —Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

*Sometimes the truth isn’t good enough, sometimes people deserve more.*

—Batman, *The Dark Knight*

Capitalism perpetuates the thrill of this anti-hero figure but in doing so has changed the mechanism of identification from the ideological one highlighted by Hobsbawm to the hedonistic pleasures of 21st century entertainment. Because the process now involves an intermediary, the media, whose primary motive is profit, it is necessary to question exactly what buying into the outlaw legend now means by investigating the implications and consequences of blind glorification of the criminal.

As the breakdown of logic inherent in the legitimate purchase of symbols that endorse thievery complicates our understanding of media representations, another glaring paradox confronts the attempt to explore how our ideals about outlaws are
translated into the everyday world. Despite our tradition of empathizing with the desperado, despite these countless sagas that glorify defiance, the United States imprisons more of its own population than any other country in the world, indeed in the history of human civilization (Bloom). This estrangement between the romantic idea of crime and its squalid reality suggests a psychological motive behind outlaw legends. Though social bandits are fondly labeled as virtuous, part of their allure stems from the fact that these figures are indeed committing crimes. However, we think of an outlaw as “good” because we mark his crimes as socially acceptable and a villain as “evil” because we deem his crime to be a vile offense. The problem lies in how we distinguish between what is and is not permissible. What might be the consequences of our idealization of a few criminals and our vilification of the rest? Does casting light upon criminal heroes reveal something about their shadowy counterparts?

Outlaw and Criminal as Effigy

Though Dwight Conquergood focuses on the performance element that drives executions in his essay “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty,” many of the ritual features of the death penalty process he discusses can be applied to bandit phenomena to understand how we rationalize treating some criminals as heroes and others as villains. Conquergood, an ethnographer and professor at Northwestern, asserts, “key to the efficacy of rituals is their capacity to embrace paradox, to gloss contradictions, to mediate profound oppositions, tensions, ambivalences, anxieties” (342). Like death penalty situations, our rituals around glorifying the outlaw are riddled with these tensions between opposing forces, for the outlaw is, as Parker suggests, “an impossible object—a character who seems to exist somewhere between fact and fiction, accommodation and resistance, economy and culture, and legal and natural senses of justice” (15). And thus, the theory of effigy, which Conquergood claims is the vehicle that drives execution rituals, also provides a framework for how we reconcile oppositions in bandit legends. An effigy is a crudely constructed distortion of an individual that comes to symbolize only one part of his or her character instead of accurately reflecting the original human being. It gains its “magical power,” according to Conquergood, “from parts, pieces, effluvia, operating on principles of contiguity and synecdoche—the piece, the part that stands for the whole—more than likeness or resemblance,”

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2 In the United States, one man out of every eighteen is either in jail or on parole or probation, which translates to over two million physically in prison and an additional five million under correctional control (Bloom).
but is still used to decide the fate of the individual because it replaces the original complexity in the eyes of the audience (353). Primarily, effigies lend insight into how we now justify the dichotomy between the individuals we incarcerate and the stories we celebrate.

In the mind of the public, the villain and the outlaw must be irreconcilably separated. Conquergood describes how with criminals, “the fundamental task of the prosecutor is to turn the accused into an effigy composed of his or her worst parts and bad deeds,” thus assuaging public guilt about sentencing a fellow human, a fellow individual, to die (354). The same process rationalizes the condemnation of other miscreants to long sentences in dehumanizing prisons instead of opting for rehabilitation. By sacrificing this effigy, they symbolically condemn not the person on trial but “all the anti-social forces of evil that threaten law and order” (354). We have seen through the distorted media constructions of Harris-Moore that the public is less concerned about the individual criminal himself than with the legend that rises up around him. Cannot this legend too be thought of as an effigy? If the villain is turned into an effigy of all that is wrong with crime, then the outlaw can be seen as a glorification of all that can be good about it.

What can be good about crime? An outlaw stands unbound by rules or laws, and this freedom is exalted as a relief from the rigidity of what Parker calls our “culture of organization” (159). Escape from the endless monotony of corporate jobs and cubicle farms seems thrilling, full of endless possibility. We admire how the bandit refuses to submit to the powerful and so reveals the limitations of their influence —how he dares to imagine a different reality. Crime connotes an independence from responsibility as well as a sense of danger, risk, and adventure, and the media sensationalizes these utopian aspects of breaking the rules while suppressing the brutality and destruction that accompanies them.

Ritual Purification

The evacuation of complexity that reduces outlaws and villains both to symbols highlights the political implications of the imposed separation between them. The romantic legends of social banditry allow citizens to vicariously experience the attractive aspects of rebellion without ever actually breaking the law. When felons in our society break the mold of our ideal outlaw, when they remind us of the nastier parts of crime, these “criminals either actual or imaginary,” as Kenneth Burke argued, “may . . . serve as [curative] scapegoats in a society that ‘purifies itself’ by ‘moral
indignation’ in condemning them” (406). The classic outlaws who populate our cultural repertoire themselves do not make desirable moral examples for the public because they so often remain defiant, and thus victorious even in capture, even in death. However, as a control tactic on the part of the state, these outlaw figures may allow for the consequence-free venting of rebellious energy, while the trials and incarcerations of everyday criminals remind the public of the ultimate power of the state that provides the protection necessary for citizens to vicariously indulge in these fantasies without corporeal risk. It is beneficial to capitalist culture for citizens to buy representations of outlaw resistance instead of performing it themselves because the nature of outlaw crimes subverts the capitalist economic system.

In this way, we construct effigies around the outlaw and the common criminal, simplifying them to black and white caricatures devoid of complexity. This is often easy to accomplish when we deal solely with legends, both in news reports and in fiction, because they represent primarily idealized myths and theoretical concepts of alternative justice even when based on historical figures. But the world is full of inconvenient yet stubborn facts that sometimes complicate our attempts at this simplification. How do we cope when we are stuck with grey?

TENSION AND AMBIVALENCE

Me? I’m dishonest, and a dishonest man you can always trust to be dishonest.
Honestly. —Jack Sparrow, Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl

When the romantic rhetoric that surrounds the idea of the social bandit is disrupted by features that are decidedly at odds with the same portrayal, the tension between our archetype and the less rosy world in which it exists comes to light. As a case study, I will examine how our romantic folklore about beloved pirates like Jack Sparrow can impede our ability to think about the crimes of the modern Somali pirates. While the media coverage of their attacks often casts these marauders as effigies of evil, our love of tricksters predisposes us to see them as effigies of good. Although Harris-Moore evoked a similar confusion, the example of piracy offers a more complex opportunity for examination.

Pirates have captured imaginations for well over four hundred years. During the Golden Age of piracy in the 17th and 18th centuries, despite the efforts of European states and merchant companies to criminalize them, pirates were often seen by the public as revolutionaries within utopian communities. Pirates have been sensationalized in the press from the 1724 publication of the General History of the
Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates, and Also Their Policies, Discipline and Government by Captain Charles Johnson, a book which has rarely been out of print for three hundred years, onwards. Twentieth century films in particular have transformed the pirate into an entity altogether unthreatening because “even when the heroes are unequivocally pirates, they are not criminals” (Roberts, qtd. in Parker 40). The Pirates of the Caribbean franchise, which has grossed 376.6 billion dollars, second only to Harry Potter in average worldwide gross per film, speaks to our enduring obsession in the 21st century (Dietz). Jack Sparrow, the principal buccaneer, represents, according to Chris Land, “the embodiment of liberated, post-modern subjectivity, ruled by his desires and completely at odds with the staid world of work and civilization,” and thus he taps into the fantasy of independence and freedom prized by the American culture of individualism and in many ways defines what it means to be a pirate (qtd. in Martin 50).

Yet the swashbuckling ways of Jack Sparrow are conspicuously absent from the mounting epidemic of piracy along the Somali coast. In 2010 alone, a thousand hostages were seized in 445 recorded attacks. And compared to dashing young men engaged in buccaneering swordplay, “Somali teenagers in speedboats, brandishing AK-47s, don’t have the same mystique” (Simon). The violence that emerges in stories about these pirates breaks the trickster archetype. What happened to the romance? The Jolly Roger? The mascara? Where is Johnny Depp? These pirates are terrorists, and yet, despite the brutality of their acts, the public has shown mixed emotions toward them because of a lingering fondness for the outlaw figure they represent and for the very real oppression Somalis face now that their fisheries have been devastated by overfishing.

Stephanie Simon interviewed Mark Summers, a pirate enthusiast and cofounder of Talk Like a Pirate Day, for a Wall Street Journal piece titled, “Real Pirates Have Taken the ‘Ho Ho’ Out of ‘Yo Ho Ho’ for Cap’n Slappy—It’s No Fun Playing Dress up, When Thugs Are at Large on High Seas.” His confusion epitomizes the clash between ideology and real life. Summers loyally defends what he calls “true” piracy, commending how it symbolizes “the romance of the open sea, self-reliance, defiance and loads of jolly good fun with a barrel (or two) of rum” (Simon). He goes as far as to contend, with a touch of resentment, “There ought to be a different word for pirates in their current incarnation.” This is ironic on multiple levels: not only do Somali raiders indeed fit the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea’s quintessential definition of a pirate,3 but the “true” pirate legacy itself is also brutal

3 “Any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends
and unromantic. Though pirates across the ages could, as a University of Pittsburgh historian puts it, “come up with some pretty gruesome things to do with people they didn’t like,” we tend to focus on the folk heroes that stress their codes of honor and the democratic elements of life on a ship (Rediker, qtd. in Simon). Though Jack Sparrow and his fictional comrades may be pirates, Disney stresses that they live with an ethics of sorts, a sense of integrity and camaraderie of a “pirate’s code” that allows us to forget that plundering is not exactly honest (Pirates of the Caribbean). A fan’s explanation that “people think of pirates the way they think of vampires—they’re fun because they’re fictional” illustrates that we have a hard time reconciling this fantastical representation when they stop being fictional and stop being fun (Ossian, qtd. in Simon).

Others, like the British journalist Johann Hari, seek to resolve this tension by uncovering a noble outlaw motif within the present day attacks. Hari does so by returning to the perspective of the pirates, identifying that like Hobsbawm’s social bandit, these men are endorsed by the local population. By highlighting how Europeans dump nuclear waste off the Somali coast and loot the waters for the seafood the struggling country depends on, these journalists attempt to explain why locals “strongly supported the piracy as a form of national defense of the country’s territorial waters” by casting the pirates as modern day Robin Hoods (Hari). Even President Obama has found it difficult to isolate the situation off Somali from the rich presence of pirate lore in history, and joked around at a DNC event in Boston: “So we’ve been pretty busy the last couple years. (Laughter.) Along the way, we dealt with H1N1 and an oil spill and pirates. (Laughter.) Do you remember pirates? (Laughter.) Golly. (Laughter.) Thomas Jefferson had to deal with pirates. I thought we were past that. (Laughter.)” (Obama). As Simon suggests, the tension that underlies discriminating between the outlaw and the criminal elements of the Somali pirates demonstrates that “from Errol Flynn to Capt. Hook to the rakish Jack Sparrow, pirates have a deep hold on popular culture. And they’re not letting go, even as the International Maritime Bureau reports that actual piracy has soared to record levels.” That these pirates can coexist as both vile aggressors and noble vigilantes in reality depending on how they are presented, even if they are indisputably classified as one or the other in our imaginations, points to a serious dilemma about legally labeling criminals. The line between fact and fiction is blurred, and this confusion draws into question the distinction between good and evil as well.

by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft” (Article 101, ”Part VII: High Seas”).
CONCLUSIONS

The treasure chests of Henry Morgan and Rock the Brazilian are real—and this reality is imaginary.—Giles Lapouge

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory.—Jean Baudrillard

“Tell me one last thing,” said Harry. “Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?”

Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry's ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.

“Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?”

—J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

In regard to the tension between the historical reality of outlaws and the legend that grows around them, our criminal justice system can only be considered legitimate so long as it proclaims to restrict its gaze to hard facts. On the other hand, Martin Parker asserts that with social bandits, “the myth is what matters, not whether Robin Hood existed, whether pirates were kind and jolly, or Dick Turpin was chivalrous” (27). What happens when we do become aware of the discrepancy between these two—when we realize that Harris-Moore’s thefts terrorized his victims, when we must face that the Somali Pirates are less than chivalrous?

The question to ask here, then, is what happens when people get turned into idols? When we identify with outlaws’ adventures, we impose our own significance onto their story, finding in it either a consolation from the oppression of our own hardships that range from tyranny to boring jobs, or the entertainment of mass media. The meaning we find in these figures is therefore self-imposed, not an inherent part of the outlaws’ lives. It is easy to forget about this imposition and to treat our romantic conception of these fanciful individuals as fact, and indeed this misunderstanding is what gives the myths their vitality. However, in order for a substitution to be effective, René Girard, a French philosopher of social science, warns, “it must never lose sight entirely… of the original object, or cease to be aware
of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim” (5). Perhaps the massive upswing of American incarceration rates that began in the late 1970’s demonstrates that we have collectively lost sight of the substitution of commodified outlaws for “real” criminals (Liptak). Perhaps now, we feel threatened by common criminals because they break our stereotype of the ideal outlaw and remind us of a tension we would rather ignore. In order to avoid acknowledging the insubstantial nature of our distinctions, we substitute their natural complexity of character and deed for all of the bad parts of criminals and crime and sacrifice that effigy so that our media-fed image can be preserved intact. This process then perpetuates our ability to raise the few (the idols) because it removes the many from sight. The cycle has become so natural that we do not recognize our substitution of the effigy of an outlaw for a real person and the effigy of a criminal for a real person until it stops lining up with the story, and only then can we see the shadow that fractures our image.

If we spend most of our lives interfacing only with the substituted representation, how can we distinguish between it and the shadow of reality? According to the postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard, the distinction between reality and simulation is irrelevant in the world today because our vision of reality is entirely dominated by simulacra. When we interact only with a map as the epigraph I include above suggests, he argues that this map becomes more real to us than the territory it represents. Just as we have lost all contact with the world that precedes the map, the vastness of our globalized, modernized world makes it easier to turn each individual into an effigy of good or evil rather than seeing him or her as a real person. We have become so disconnected from individual realities that there is now no way to go back and humanize them, nor would we want to, because this simple representation is attractive and makes sense. Effigies are easy, but real people are complicated. If no authentic manifestation of reality exists, then, both the map and the territory, the criminal and the outlaw, are real, and both are imaginary.

If we never relate to the actual world because our experience is always mediated, and if, as Baudrillard claims, we have lost the ability to see the truth without being obstructed by its representations, what gives us the authority to distinguish between the truth and its representations in situations of criminal justice? Sociologist Jeff Ferrell, the American Society of Criminology’s 1998 Critical Criminologist

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4 Families of lawbreakers, a seemingly ever-increasing demographic, do see the reality of the convicted, though I doubt this keeps them from loving Jack Sparrow.
of the Year, posits that the official police reports and the statistics that bombard us from newspapers and television reports, though widely accepted to represent reality because of the authority they exude, are just as biased as the legends widely accepted as exaggerated. If “what accumulates as ‘true’ about crime is mostly fiction,” Ferrell argues, “‘romanticism’ may mostly mark cultural criminologists’ diversion from this fiction” (98). If the law enforcement’s portrayal of the reality of a criminal’s malevolent transgressions is skewed, perhaps their outlaw legend, so widely dismissed as an exaggeration, as a fantasy without root in this world, is just as relevant to our understanding. And if whether we see a “criminal” or an “outlaw” just depends on our interactions with sources that cannot ever capture reality, our subjective interpretations should not be given the power to decide the fates of the millions of individuals who face judgment each year. Our criminal justice system cannot afford this subjectivity.

In order to properly address this tension, then, we would have to go back to the original ritual and recognize that we have lost sight of the humanity of both outlaws and criminals, that both have become fiction. However, this acknowledgement is an unpopular option. We created this distraction for a reason, and the substitution of effigies enables us to enjoy our media and to maintain order in the streets. Recognizing the subjectivity of our assumptions will require us to defy human nature’s fondness for simplifications, but this defiance is necessary for justice to be upheld.

While I only described Jason Kersten’s romanticized portrait of Harris-Moore in “The Airplane Thief,” his final image of Harris-Moore bedraggled and defeated in capture is not the audacious and triumphant one we might expect. He concludes his celebration of Harris-Moore’s trickery with the doleful testimony that, “in the end, he was a scared, suicidal kid, far from home and literally all washed up.” This lamentation forces us to acknowledge that in the end, stripped of fans’ imposed fantasies, Harris-Moore is lost in a very real, sober world where distorted, rip-roaring tales told to entertain strangers are of no comfort to him—a world where he is condemned to become yet another statistic on juvenile delinquency. Harris-Moore’s disturbingly unromantic arrest casts him out of the role of our criminal hero. The Facebook statuses and T-shirt sales have dried up, and even the court proceedings have lost popular interest. The guise of the idealized hero, and the curious, shallow fame it brings, cannot be maintained in this society, despite our affinity for it. As soon as Harris-Moore was not able to sustain the ruse, to fit the mold, the followers who had reveled in his rebellion were finished with him. A documentary chronicling the cross-country chase will forever preserve the memory of the dashing bandit he
once was, even as the real Colt is in solitary confinement, thus both the outlaw and the criminal will coexist. Both will be real, and both will be imaginary.

Author’s Note: I would like to recognize Dr. Donna Hunter for the inspiration and joy of learning she fosters in her classes. She goes above and beyond what is expected of a college professor, and I am deeply grateful for her time and energy. The paper you just read would not have been possible without her. Thank you, Donna.

WORKS CITED


INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Kaitlyn’s approach to the project that resulted in “When Gaming Goes Bad” started as a very broad one. As one of only three female students enrolled in my predominantly male Rhetoric of Gaming class, she was prompted to confront and challenge the relationship between gender and gaming identity from the first day. As we discussed a variety of topics in class—from avatar creation to the gamer stereotype, fun and frustration in gameplay, and multiplayer dynamics—she began to formulate her own set of research questions that filtered these issues through a more gendered lens: What is the female experience within the video game community like? How does this influence the levels at which women game? What is the female gamer stereotype? How accurate is this stereotype?

These questions, taken directly from her initial topic brainstorm, demonstrate the broad scope of her line of inquiry in the early weeks of the quarter. As she began diving into research, her focus sharpened: she was drawn away from more banal topics such as the sexist portrayal of female characters in video games to one with more rigor, more originality, and, arguably, even more relevance to the world inside and outside of gaming: online sexual harassment.

This paper represents the culmination of her exploration of this sometimes disturbing topic. In particular, the first-hand accounts from female gamers gave her pause during her research, as she often found the examples of harassment they detailed too graphic to include in her essay and yet too vital as evidence to exclude. Her challenge, then, as a writer was to carefully mediate between the sensitivities of her audience and her need to do justice to her topic. In addition, what began as a simple analysis, during revision, turned into more of a policy argument as she moved from just identifying the troubling trend of sexual harassment in online gaming to advocating for very concrete solutions for this problem. The result is an important discussion of how gaming can “go bad,” one that gives voice to the often overlooked experience of the girl gamer and that opens up the possibility for further discussion of the impacts of hate speech, online and off.

—Christine Alfano
Bullets at lightning speed whiz past your head left and right, as explosions go off in the background. In the midst of a fictional World War III, soldiers wearing S.W.A.T. Team lookalike uniforms charge fiercely through the streets of a ravaged London. Time counts down, and your team must eradicate enemy forces in order to complete the mission. Skillfully you press buttons on your trusty controller, making shot after shot like a champ. Within moments “Victory!” pops up on the screen and glory music fades in as the battle scene dims away. Congratulatory remarks are exchanged amongst you and your virtual team, an agglomeration of players randomly selected online. Although your brain is buzzing with excitement and pride, those feelings quickly evaporate as comments from members of the opposing team filter in through the game’s integrated voice chat feature.

“Darn. I can’t believe we lost to a team with a fat chick on it!” someone exclaims.

“I know,” someone else agrees.

A familiar numbness sets in and instantly you know they are talking about you. “There is no need to be a sore loser,” you respond calmly.

“Oh, I’m not complaining,” the attacker rationalizes. “I’m just stating a fact: only ugly girls play videogames.”

“Yes, you must be a pig, since you’re a girl playing a videogame,” the other chimes in.

Even though you know the comments hold zero merit, the words still sting. Frustrated,
you press the mute button, silencing the laughter, and place your controller on the coffee table. You are done playing Modern Warfare 3 on Xbox Live for the day, and a victory has never tasted so bitter.

Competition and trash-talk go together like a child’s lemonade stand and a nice summer day. In other words, for as long as games have been around, trash-talking has been an associated practice. While the use of boastful or insulting speech to intimidate or humiliate can have value as a psychological strategy, when the remarks attack someone for their gender, perceived sexual orientation, or race, many would agree that a line has been crossed. For female video gamers, trash-talking that crosses the line occurs far too often during online videogame sessions. Surprisingly, the situation simulated above would be considered mild relative to the explicit language and threats female gamers regularly face online. While some want to brush off the issue as just the horseplay of some twelve year old boys, the reality is that the perpetrators are often adult men who are not employing this form of speech for strategic game play purposes. Harassment should not be accepted as an aspect of videogame culture. In order to create an atmosphere in which female gamers do not have to play in fear of online abuse, videogame creators need to take more action to prevent hurtful behavior, by-standing gamers need to stop silently condoning harassment, and bullies need to be subjected to consequences for their antics. Gaming should be enjoyable for all participants, and trash-talk that becomes gender-targeting hate speech should not be allowed to change that.

WHAT DOES ONLINE VIDEOGAME HARASSMENT LOOK LIKE?

Since the inception of multiplayer online gaming, gamers from different locations have been able to come together virtually and play their favorite games. Schoolyard buddies can shoot each other in Halo 4 from the comfort of their own homes, while a player in Tokyo can join forces with another player in Berlin to defeat mythical creatures in World of Warcraft. Moreover, technological advancements have enhanced online gameplay in other ways. Nowadays, multiplayer online gaming services have servers that can support millions of players, and integrated voice chat enables gamers to communicate verbally while playing. Unfortunately, online harassment towards female gamers has arisen as an unwanted side effect of improved videogame technology. To some degree, trash-talk in competitive play is to be expected, and mind games and taunting are arguably part of the game. However, there is a fine line between acceptable gamer trash-talk and unrelated cyber harassment. While
the former may involve comments about poor strategy or a lack of skill, the latter includes comments that are quite disturbing and shocking by nature. For female gamers in online settings, harassment generally includes sexist or misogynist comments, threats of rape and death, as well as demands for sexually-related images or favors. According to a survey conducted by Emily Matthews on Pricecharting Blog involving 874 respondents, “63% of women reported being called a “c*nt, bitch, slut, and whore” while gaming. Others reported they were threatened with sexual assault, asked for sexual favors, and bombarded with stereotypical comments regarding female gender roles” (Nunneley). Comments related to female gender roles range from “go make me a sandwich” to “get back in the kitchen and make me some pie” (Nunneley). Generally, the content of the harassment does not relate to gaming, and unlike trash-talk, harassment is solely intended to mentally wound or silence female gamers.

Unfortunately, harassment and the mental pain it causes become nearly inescapable for female gamers because abuse can be received through a couple of mediums. Integrated voice chat and messaging are intended to enhance gameplay, but when gamers exploit these features for the use of harassment they have the opposite effect. For instance, outspoken harassers may choose to spew their venomous attacks live during real-time game play using a chat feature and headset. Instantaneously and in front of an audience, bullies can degrade or tear down female gamers in a matter of seconds. Alternatively, some bullies will let text do the talking and instead choose to spam a gamer’s inbox with crude messages and foul language. While this technique is more private, female gamers can receive a deluge of messages if the bully is particularly persistent. Regardless of the method, abusers make sure to get their message across. Although amongst the over 40 million online gamers (Raby), the individuals responsible for harassment make up a small minority, they are an outrageously loud minority whose presence cannot be ignored.

In recent months online videogame harassment has received increasing attention from media outlets as more stories of harassment towards female gamers have surfaced. In August 2012, Amy O’Leary wrote a *New York Times* article that gave a mainstream voice to the issue. The article detailed the backlash Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic, faced this past summer from those who reject that gender biases exist within the videogame community. Sarkeesian runs the video blog “Feminist Frequency” and a Youtube Channel with the same name that mainly focuses on the depiction of women in popular culture. A few months ago she posted a video on her Youtube channel announcing her Kickstarter campaign
to examine female stereotypes within videogames. In her video and blog posts, Sarkeesian speaks articulately about videogames and exudes undeniable passion about her work. However, her warm smile and happy demeanor have now been replaced with pain and fear, because shortly after the fundraiser video was posted, Sarkeesian received threats, harassment, and abuse online. Within days, comments flooded in threatening Sarkeesian with death, rape, and violence. Furthermore, commenters told Sarkeesian “to shut her mouth, get back in the kitchen, and die of cancer” (Chambers). Matters became especially intense when her “Wikipedia page was vandalized with pornographic images, attempts were made to hack "Feminist Frequency," and threats were made against her personal safety” (16x9: Dangerous Game). Shortly after, an online game called Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian was posted in which players could click on a picture of Sarkeesian, and with each successive click bruises and blood would appear over her image. All of this was the direct result of Sarkeesian publicly revealing that she simply wanted to explore the sexist and misogynist nature of the videogame world. While Sarkeesian did not experience harassment during an online videogame session, her experience is still valuable, because it reveals how hostile the gaming community can become online, especially when topics of gender inequality and mistreatment are brought into question.

More closely related to harassment during online videogame sessions, Miranda Pakozdi, an experienced gamer, endured trash-talk from her own coach while competing in the Cross Assault video game tournament earlier this year. Cross Assault is a fighting game reality show that pits fighting game enthusiasts against each other. The event is streamed live online and is available to be re-watched as well. During the most recent tournament, Miranda Pakozdi was competing as one of five members on the team Tekken coached by Aris Bahktanians. From Day 1 of competition, Bahktanians publicly directed trash-talk towards Pakozdi that clearly crossed the line. He questioned her bra size, made intrusive comments about her body, asked her to wear a skirt during subsequent days of competition, and even requested to smell her. The taunting was relentless and interestingly not directed towards any of the male members of Tekken in any way comparable. Ultimately, Pakozdi grew so exhausted by the harassment she forfeited the competition by committing virtual suicide. According to Amy O’Leary in an interview with Tess Vigeland for Marketplace, Pakozdi “was in an elimination round and she just walked her character into the opponent without any defense and was killed off” (Vigeland). This incident is significant because it sheds light on not only the extent of online harassment, but how destructive the practice is. Online harassment can go too far,
and when giving up a videogame one enjoys becomes the only way a gamer can find sanity, there is a problem. Referencing Emily Matthew’s survey again, “35.8% of women reported having quit playing temporarily because of sexism, and 9.6% reported that they quit playing a certain game permanently because of harassment” (Nunneley). Players should not have to give up favorite pastimes because others lack a grasp on what it means to be respectful.

In order to avoid harassment online, women are faced with several options short of giving up on gaming altogether. Essentially each “solution” involves disguising one’s femininity. It is common for female gamers who play online to choose ambiguous screen names and masculine avatar images. Some women go as far as muting their mikes during virtual game play so that other players cannot hear their voices and distinguish that they are female. It is unfortunate because today’s technological advancements, including live microphones and the ability to play virtually with players all over the world, are meant to enhance the overall gaming experience. Yet, female gamers in many cases do not get to enjoy the benefits of improved game play, and must hide who they are simply so they can play in peace. In many situations if female players do not take these sorts of measures, they become instant targets and face harassment. Rebecca Glasure, a gamer profiled in Robbie Cooper’s *Alter Ego Avatars and Their Creators*, explains why covering up one’s gender in the gaming world is appealing. Not wanting to get hit on or underestimated, Glasure made her avatar in the game City of Heroes her complete opposite: large, African-American, and male. She quickly noticed that other players interacted with her differently, saying, “Being a guy enabled me to form relationships that I would never otherwise be able to experience. If I’m the leader, I can make a call and they’ll all just follow… When I play as a female character, I get challenged a lot more and have to argue about everything” (Cooper). Within masculine genres, such as fighting games or shooter games, there is an obvious male dominance. Usually these are the settings where female gamers encounter the most resistance, as Glasure described, and are most vulnerable for harassment.
IS THIS REALLY AN ISSUE?

Currently the most prominent argument defending harassment in online videogames is that the behavior, including the use of sexually explicit language, is an innocuous aspect of gameplay and not meant to be taken to heart by other gamers. Some will go as far to argue that harassment is a legitimate aspect of the culture of some gaming communities, such as the fighting game community. During the Cross Assault tournament, Aris Bakhtanians defended not only his actions towards Pakozdi, but the idea that sexual harassment is a part of the fighting game culture. He insisted, “If you remove [sexual harassment] from the fighting game community, it’s not the fighting game community” (Kuchera). Later he implies that it is “ethically wrong” (Kuchera) for anyone to try to remove sexual harassment, and that it is a characteristic of fighting genre gameplay people need to accept. Additionally, in a series of statements made during a live stream of the Cross Assault tournament, Bakhtanians claims, “The beauty of the fighting game community, and you should know this—it’s based around not being welcome. That’s the beauty of it. That’s the key essence of it. When you walk into an arcade for the first time, nobody likes you” (Kuchera). While Bahktanians is an outlier in regards to supporting sexual harassment during gameplay, he and others clearly embrace a hostile environment within videogames. It is important to note, however, that harassment is not seen as a cultural aspect exclusive to the fighting game community. The controversial reality is that this attitude has also been adopted by players in shooter game communities and Massive Multiplayer Online communities as well. Basically, some gamers share the viewpoint that the code of conduct guiding social interaction in the real world has no place in the virtual world of videogames.

Not all of the videogame community is clouded by the misguided idea that harassment and misogynistic views towards female gamers are acceptable. Many gamers do not partake in harassment, nor do they agree that harassment should remain a part of the online videogame culture. In fact, men are just as disturbed by harassment and sexism as women. James Bosier, a father and MMO player, shared that such behavior reflects poorly on the gaming community as a whole, and “diminishes the experience for everyone” (Pinchefsky 4). Furthermore, “it plays into the stereotype that people who play games are nerdy, misogynistic men who live with their parents. It continues to prevent us from being a more respected medium” (Pinchefsky 4). Another MMO gamer, Matt Ross, wants to see more action, stating that there is a “need to see a harder stance from gaming companies. There are community leaders who can step up and say, “This is a problem”” (Pinchefsky 4). Fortunately, this
specific kind of action is occurring. Not too long after the Cross Assault tournament incident, two commentators working for LevelUp, an Internet broadcaster of gaming events, made light of sexual harassment on camera. LevelUp not only barred the two commentators, but issued a formal apology, including statements from the commentators (O’Leary). This unfortunate event got a somewhat positive ending, and shows that even companies within the industry are willing to take responsibility for their role in harassment within the gaming community.

Some companies want to take an even more proactive role in combating videogame harassment. Tom Cannon, co-founder of EVO, the largest fighting game tournament, pulled his company’s sponsorship of the weekly LevelUp series after its commentators downplayed sexual harassment on camera. Cannon justified the decision, saying that “we cannot continue to let ignorant, hateful speech slide” (The Beat). He also voiced that “The nasty undercurrent in the scene isn’t a joke or a meme. It’s something we need to fix” (The Beat). Similarly, when Anita Sarkeesian posted her Kickstarter seeking backers so she could examine Tropes vs. Women in Videogames, she received immense support. Although her goal was only to raise $6,000 for her Kickstarter project, within 24 hours Sarkeesian’s project had reached its funding goal, and after a month over 6100 backers had donated over $150,000. This overwhelming support shows that not everyone opposes examining gender issues in the videogame community. Many gamers and industry insiders do not want to be characterized as condoners of harassment nor as accepting of the bogus idea that harassment should continue to represent gaming culture. Harassment is not the expression of a majority of gamers, but the expression of an attention-seeking, loud minority.

In addition to those who align with the argument that harassment is culturally acceptable, others attempt to downplay harassment towards female gamers from the stance that gamers have freedom of speech and should be allowed to say or message whatever they please. It is no surprise that Bahktanians shares this viewpoint as well. In his same rant regarding sexual harassment and the fighting game community being one in the same, he stated, “We’re in America! This isn’t North Korea! We can say what we want” (Kuchera). Some gamers feel that the First Amendment gives them the right to express their thoughts, regardless of how vulgar or offensive they may be. However, when free speech can be characterized as hate speech, it places limitations on someone else’s ability to speak, which is in essence counterproductive to the original free speech argument. Ally Fogg, a writer and journalist who writes extensively on gender issues, once commented on how hate speech unlike free speech can impede an individual’s ability to speak freely.
What you fail to understand is that the use of hate speech, threats and bullying to terrify and intimidate people into silence or away from certain topics is a far bigger threat to free speech than any legal sanction.

Imagine this is not the internet but a public square. One woman stands on a soapbox and expresses an idea. She is instantly surrounded by an army of 5,000 angry people yelling the worst kind of abuse at her in an attempt to shut her up. Yes, there's a free speech issue there. But not the one you think. (Qtd. in Lewis)

Fogg makes an excellent point that applies beyond the videogame community to anyone being silenced by hate speech, intimidation, and abuse. Often when harassment in the videogame community is brought up, the critic is faced with a deluge of backlash. Comments, images, and other responses surface that are meant to overwhelm the critic and dissuade others from speaking up if they want to avoid similar treatment. This makes it difficult to combat the issue. Moreover, in the fight against harassment toward female gamers, free speech and censorship are not the issues on trial. The problem is a lack of respect, and every human being deserves to be respected on the most basic level. When gamers use sexist, misogynist, or hateful speech towards female gamers (or any gamer regardless of gender) they are disrespecting people and their place within the gaming community, and to a larger sense within the world.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Solving the problem of harassment towards female gamers will require action by a variety of groups, each with different stakes in the gaming community. Ultimately, the responsibility to eliminate vicious speech and derogatory language from the gaming atmosphere falls on the shoulders of game developers, the hosts of gaming sites and platforms, and gamers themselves. Moreover, the solutions to this issue have to be simple and practical. Also, they must be able to be implemented at this present moment, and they must conform to the needs of various communities and cultures. These are factors that must be kept in mind if there is to be any successful remedy for the current situation.

If we want to get to the root of the issue, we first need to reexamine the construction of many videogames on the market, and how their design impacts videogame culture. Gender portrayal and harassment of women players are separate topics, but as the Anita Sarkeesian story indicates, the two are interrelated. Many have noticed an
inaccuracy with how gender (and race, sexuality, etc.) is portrayed by videogames. Videogames regularly reinforce and amplify sexist ideas about women. Moreover, female characters in videogames are often hyper-sexualized or objectified. As Steven Zoeller has pointed out in his column for OUDaily.com, “the average female video game character is incredibly skinny, scantily-clad, big-breasted, fair-skinned and athletic.” By considering a spectrum of notable female characters across a variety of genres, Image 2 affirms the unrealistic portrayal of women in videogames. From the narrow waistlines to barely existent clothing, the depiction of female characters creates a climate in which women are to be lusted after rather than respected. Zoeller goes on to articulate the dangers of sexualizing female characters, stating that “it portrays women as mere objects for pleasure and decoration, not as feeling and thinking persons.” While it may be hard to accept, the content of videogames is a reflection of ideas that exist within society and this content is in turn meant to appeal to a certain audience. In short, videogames intake sexist societal views about women then output strong messages about gender to players, thus continuing a cycle of misinformation and misrepresentation.

Misrepresented gender relates to harassment towards female gamers because when the games themselves fail to represent women accurately, an atmosphere that does not entirely respect females is created, specifically within the gaming community. Players are encouraged by game creators and the games themselves to overlook women as human beings, and instead view them merely as “Damsels in Distress” or “Sexy Sidekicks.” As a result, when female gamers appear in a gaming session, players who regard fictional female characters with a low level of respect due to how gender is portrayed are enticed to regard actual women with low levels of respect as well. Thus, by sending subtle cues about gender, videogames can
influence how people behave. Designing games that better represent women could lead to a more “female-friendly” gaming environment. While there are a few games that portray women realistically, creating more games that depict women wholly is a direction the industry needs to take. Although such an effort would require a lot of time, by correcting the erroneous messages that videogames currently perpetuate, the atmosphere of the videogame community can indirectly be improved, leading to a decline in harassment.

Curbing videogame harassment could occur more quickly if the companies running online multiplayer gaming services took a firmer stance. Xbox LIVE,¹ which is operated by Microsoft Corporation, is one of the most visible and most often referenced services when issues of videogame harassment surface. While there is an Xbox LIVE Code of Conduct in place to manage behavior, sexism is not specifically mentioned anywhere in the text. Under Section B users are instructed not to “harass, abuse, or spam other players, or encourage other players to do so” (Xbox LIVE Code). This text in some ways is vague, and fails to distinguish when trash-talk goes too far. On a different web page devoted to reporting abuse, Microsoft goes on to define abuse as “any violations of our terms of service or code of conduct that includes behavior like harassment, bullying, posting inappropriate content, etc.” (Reporting Abuse on Xbox). Noticeably, abuse is never clarified to encompass sexist, misogynist, threatening, or sexually explicit language, all of which become problematic for female gamers. In order to genuinely go after the issue, companies need to first officially recognize the role sexism plays in inciting harassment, and elaborate in the Code of Conduct that this form of behavior is not permitted.

Next, companies need to consider how online gaming features can be used to improve matters. By manipulating the technology that is already established, hosting sites could play a major role in limiting harassment. In late April 2012, a web series entitled Extra Credits hosted by James Portnow released an episode on harassment in the videogame community. In the episode, several solutions were suggested that involved altering current technology in order to put an end to videogame harassment. Currently, all services that offer integrated chat keep track of metrics on how often gamers are muted by other players. Extra Credits suggests using these metrics to employ an auto-mute feature. If a player is muted 10% above the norm for all players (which would imply a high rate of being muted) the player could be

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¹ Xbox LIVE is an online multiplayer gaming and digital media service. The online gaming service allows users with an Xbox console to play multiplayer gaming online with other Xbox LIVE users.
started as auto-muted. According to Extra Credits “this wouldn’t prevent them from
talking, and it wouldn’t prevent anyone who wants to hear them from unmuting
them, but it would take away their megaphone and keep them from easily degrading
those around them” (Extra Credits). Also, auto-muting would attach a stigma to
bad behavior, and give gamers an idea of what to expect from a player before they
start playing. Extra Credits goes on to suggest that this same system could be applied
to messaging in game services. If most of the messages (perhaps 80%) a player sends
receive no response, that player can be restricted to only being able to send messages
to people on his or her friends list. This would prevent players from being able to
spam another gamer’s inbox with vulgar or sexually explicit messages. The most
extreme measures gaming services could employ would be to enact permanent bans
on offensive gamers or blocking a gamer’s console from even being able to connect to
the server. Obviously, this would be an extreme action, but it proves that companies
have immense control when it comes to curbing harassment, and set the standards
for what type of behavior is tolerated during online gaming.

Finally, the individuals with the most power in their hands to inspire change are
gamers themselves. Gamers are the consumers buying videogames that stereotype
women, and gamers are the users of multiplayer online gaming services. Gamers
create the culture within the gaming community, and gamers can ultimately inject
the value of respect directly into that very culture. In the article Sexual Harassment
in Videogame Culture, Carol Pinchefsky insists that “it’s time for players to call out
harassers” (Pinchefsky 4). Social pressure could be highly effective in inspiring a
change in behavior. Common advice to gamers is to ignore harassment. This is poor
advice, however, because ignoring harassers does not create a healthy, supportive
community, but instead creates a community in which abuse is tolerated. Instead of
silently condoning harassment by ignoring it, gamers need to be active about calling
out bad behavior and reporting it to administrators. The more gamers vocalize a
desire to remove hateful speech and bullying from the gamer community, the more
likely action is to be taken. Moreover, if more people speak out, victims may have
the courage to share and seek help for their injustices. Extra Credits suggests that
gamers write to software companies, such as Microsoft, to ask for auto-muting or
other technological power that would give gamers the ability to assign consequences
to abusers. Similarly, the website Fat, Ugly, or Slutty, encourages gamers to share
their woes, by allowing gamers to catalogue online abuse via a blog. The screenshots
and audio posted on this site are generally too graphic or offensive to be reproduced
in this paper, but the site as a whole gives the public an accurate inside look at what
female gamers face. Lastly, Sam Killerman, a gamer from Austin, Texas, started a campaign site called Gamers Against Bigotry. GAB seeks pledges and donations from supporters of the fight against online video game harassment and bullying, and is additional evidence that the gaming community is uniting against harassment. These entities are just a few examples of individuals who understand the importance of publicizing online videogame harassment in order to incite change.

WILL THE VIDEOGAME COMMUNITY OVERCOME HARASSMENT?

For the longest time the videogame community has been a place of inclusion and acceptance. Whether you were a reclusive misfit or a social butterfly, you were welcomed open-armed into the world of gaming. Arcades gave teenagers a place to escape after a stressful day of school, while roleplaying games offered a wistful visionary the chance to dive into a fantasy world and assume an alter ego. Despite the genre, videogames met their primary goal of providing gamers with a fun and enjoyable experience. However, it cannot be denied that the growth of online videogame harassment towards female gamers not only takes the fun out of playing videogames, but is a problem plaguing the gaming community. When gamers target and bully other players because of their gender (or any other inherent characteristic), they are establishing a community of exclusion and alienation, a type of community that directly goes against what gaming was originally all about.

Fortunately, online gaming does not have to continue to journey down a path defined by hate and intolerance. Game creators can design games in a way that do not promote stereotypes and sexualized ideas about women. Moreover, the companies that run multiplayer online gaming services can improve their policies in order to protect gamers from sexist or misogynist abuse. Most importantly, gamers themselves can change the climate of the gaming community by renewing the importance of respect within gameplay, calling out harassers, and vocalizing that bullying is not acceptable nor will it be tolerated. Trash-talk that crosses the line diminishes the quality of gameplay for everyone, not just female gamers. It is time the gaming community put a stop to online videogame harassment. Never again should a female gamer have to press mute or relinquish her controller due to harassment. In games like Modern Warfare 3, the goal is to virtually shoot down an on-screen enemy, not to verbally demoralize the girl-gamer who is masterfully pressing buttons and kicking your butt.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


**IMAGE SOURCES (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**


WINTER 2013 WINNER

Amy Bearman

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. But it’s also the art of choosing: what to say and how to say it. Take, for instance, the fact that people feel the impact of loss about twice as acutely as the impact of gain. This means that if you ask a group of doctors whether they’d recommend a treatment that will save 80 out of 100 patients, the majority will say yes. But if you ask another group of doctors whether they’d recommend a treatment that would result in 20 out of 100 patients dying, the majority will say no. Mathematically, the choices are the same. Rhetorically, however, they’re worlds apart—as different as life and death.

“Decisions, Rhetoric, and the Art of Choosing” was a course about how rhetoric shapes our choices—about its role in our decision-making process. Amy began her research-based argument by considering her relationship with technology and the implicit choices that she makes. Why, she wondered, did she refer to her iPhone as if it had a gender and personality? Why did she interpret humor and sarcasm in Siri’s responses to her questions? Curiosity and excitement fuelled Amy’s research, and the product is a fascinating, sophisticated essay that explores affective computing, as well as the social and ethical problems that artificial intelligence raises. It is an accomplished piece of writing not just because of Amy’s sound research and analysis, but also because of her talent for crafting a good story. Into this scholarly narrative, she deftly incorporates her experience as a consumer of technology, as a woman pursuing a degree in a technical field dominated by men, and as a child growing up with technology. Amy’s essay displays the best of what PWR aims to foster: intellectual curiosity, excellent research skills, and the ability to articulate a compelling, insightful argument.

—Ryan Zurowski
The Soul of a New Machine: The Social-Psychological Aspects of Human-Computer Interaction

Amy Bearman

I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do. —The HAL 9000 computer, in 2001: A Space Odyssey

After my Android phone recently gave its last gasp, I switched to the realm of Apple products and their promises of ultra-thin, ultra-fast, ultra-light—ultra-everything—technology. Cradling a brand-new iPhone 5, I amused myself with the voice recognition tool conjured up by the click of a button: the much-advertised “personal assistant” that Apple christened “Siri.” At first, I marveled at the array of built-in functions Siri could “assist me with”: she could text my mother, play a certain song, navigate to my home, or even reserve a table at a restaurant. Soon, I was tempted to test Siri’s reaction to unpredictable, playful questions or statements that might require a more human response:

Me: Define supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.
Siri: The sound of that is something quite atrocious.

Me: Do you believe in God?
Siri: My policy is the separation of spirit and silicon.

Me: Will you marry me?
Siri: My End User Licensing Agreement does not cover marriage. My apologies.

Me: You’re my best friend.
Siri: If you insist.

Me: How much do you cost?
Siri: If you have to ask the price, you can’t afford it.

Siri’s answers were humorous and clever, and I reacted emotionally to them. I was annoyed when she avoided answering a question. I laughed when she told a joke. I asked the same question twice to see if she would give a different response, even though I knew she would not have any new information. At times, I found myself carrying out a genuine “conversation” with her.

Of course, Siri is not a woman or even a person. She is a computer, and computers are not alive. They have neither affections nor passions. If you prick a computer, it will not bleed. Nor will it laugh if you tickle it, die if you poison it, take revenge if you wrong it. Hollywood blockbusters such as I, Robot or 2001: A Space Odyssey may try to convince us otherwise, but a computer has no sense of self. Unless programmed to do so, it will not even refer to itself as “I.” Computers are essentially soulless lumps of metal and silicon: a collection of processing units and integrated circuits that have the ability to carry out complex operations much faster than the human brain. My cell phone’s computer has no personality; it only reads from a script of pre-recorded responses that Apple’s engineers have written. As a computer science major, I am well aware of this fact. I recognize that my iPhone—and all computers—are just glorified electronic data storage and analysis devices. So why do I inject so much meaning into Siri’s tongue-in-cheek responses?

What sets Siri apart from other voice recognition software is that she—it—projects the illusion of personality, encouraging iPhone users to perceive human traits in their computers and to develop an emotional bond with the technology. In this respect, she exploits our tendency to confuse life-like characteristics with the presence of life. In biological terms, life requires a number of natural processes, including growth, metabolism, reproduction, and adaption. But people’s perception of life depends

primarily on the observation of intelligent behavior. If people perceive that an entity possesses intelligence, they also tend to believe that the entity has a higher level of consciousness. For this reason, people treat domestic dogs differently from trees: both are alive, but dogs appear to be smarter and more self-aware.

The perception that intelligence and consciousness determine life applies to computers as well. The vast majority of participants in studies claim that they would never treat a computer as a person, yet their professed “rejection of anthropomorphism” contrasts with their actual behavior in labs and in everyday life. As researchers Clifford Nass and Byron Reeves have established in their “Computers are Social Actors” paradigm, the more intelligent and conscious a machine appears, the more people apply standard social norms when interacting with it. That phenomenon is the subject of this essay. First, I will investigate how and why people use the same social heuristics when they interact with technology that they use for interactions with other humans, in particular: the application of gender stereotypes, empathy, responses to praise and criticism, the evaluation of the computer’s “personality,” and reciprocity and retaliation. Second, I will analyze both the benefits and ethical implications of artificial intelligence and social computers.

In so doing, I will reveal that there are two ways in which artificial intelligence imitates human consciousness: affectivity—the ability to cause or express emotion—and autonomy. For psychological reasons that I will explain, we actually perceive these computers as being life-like and so endow them with human qualities, therefore investing more of our trust in them than if we viewed them as mere computational devices. The more human-like a computer becomes, the more we trust it to make decisions for us. And in many ways, computers are better decision-makers than people. They are not susceptible to common causes of human error, such as biases, fatigue, distraction, memory limitations, and an inability to multitask. A computer might be just the tool to handle complex activities such as driving a car, juggling the GPS navigation system, stereo, air-conditioning, entertainment for the kids, cruise control, etc. while allowing the driver to remain in charge.

The problem with artificial intelligence is that we want the best of both worlds: we expect computers to act as our emotional companions yet still behave with


computer-like precision. This is an impossible standard. As I argue here, more affective and autonomous machines are fit to act as extensions of the human mind, but they cannot negate human fallibility or be held accountable for their actions as sovereign beings. For, as I have learned, although she can tell a sophisticated joke or deliver a snarky comeback, Siri may misinterpret the most innocuous request:

Me: Call me a taxi.

Siri: From now on, I’ll call you ‘Taxi,’ okay?

REASON VS. EMOTION: ASSIGNING GENDER STEREOTYPES TO COMPUTERS

To understand how humans interact with computers, it is important first to understand how people interact with each other. There are two primary forces that drive human behavior: reason and emotion. These two forces are traditionally considered to be inverses of each other. We assign reason to the realm of mathematics and the hard sciences, and this field is conventionally considered to be devoid of emotion. In contrast, emotion and intuition are more influential in the liberal arts, such as language, literature, and philosophy. People associate reason with the intelligence, while they sometimes disparage emotion as a lesser way of knowing. As a female pursuing a science/engineering education in a field dominated by men, I am inclined to reject emotion as a source of knowledge in order to challenge the gender stereotype that men are better at logic and reasoning, while women tend to be more “in touch” with their emotions. However, neither gender operates exclusively in one realm; nor is reason necessarily the superior way of knowing. There are numerous personality tests that measure one’s “emotional intelligence,” which many psychologists now regard as a valid skill in analyzing interpersonal relationships and making decisions. Recent studies show that “emotions play an essential role in rational decision making, perception, learning, and a variety of other cognitive functions.” Attempting to dichotomize the brain into thinking and feeling sections—“cortical and limbic activity”—understates the complexity of the human brain. The influence of emotion on decision-making causes humans to be unpredictable and sentimental when they make choices; computers by contrast, as Rosalind Picard observes, are often hailed as the “paradigms of logic, rationality, and predictability.”

“and,” “or,” and “not” operations) to carry out a finite sequence of algorithms. Traditionalists argue against endowing computers with the capacity for emotion for both practical and ethical reasons. Practically speaking, why impair computers’ clear algorithmic reasoning with human-like “disorganized,” “irrational,” and “visceral” emotional responses? Further, Stacey Edgar, a professor of computer ethics, raises the ethical implications of creating an emoting artificial intelligence. If we give computers the ability to express emotion, she asks, should we also equip them with pain nerves or the ability to express pleasure? What is our moral responsibility to the machines we create? I will discuss these ethical dilemmas later in this essay, but for now I want to analyze computers’ abilities to recognize and express emotions only within the scope of their interactions with humans, which researcher Rosalind Picard calls “affective computing.” Computers incorporating emotions would not be any less masculine, rational, or intelligent, but rather more human, and therefore more suited to communicate with humans.

In order to test the theory that computers are social actors, researchers have carried out a number of studies that suggest that we apply social heuristics when interacting with computers. Perhaps the most telling are those that involved gender stereotypes—a social category that provokes a powerful visceral response in humans. If people are truly impervious to computers’ attempts to masquerade as human beings, then a computer’s perceived “gender” should have no impact on how an individual interacts with a computer. However, this is not the case. In one amusing instance, the German engineering company BMW was forced to recall its navigation system. The cause? German men objected to the female voice used to record directions. Even when assured that the voice was merely a recording, and that the engineers and cartographers who designed the system were all men, some German men simply refused to take directions from a “woman”—computer or not.

In another study, researchers analyzed whether or not gender stereotypes would affect people’s perceptions of voice output on computers. College students, both male and female, were subjected to a tutoring session presented verbally by a prerecorded female or male voice on two topics: “computers and technology,” and “love and relationships.” The results fell directly in line with the hypothesis that “individuals would mindlessly

9 Edgar, Morality and Machines, 455.
Both males and females found the male-voiced computer to be more friendly, competent, and compelling than the female-voiced computer, even though the computers’ spoken content was identical. Moreover, the “female” computer was judged to be more informative about love and relationships, whereas the “male” computer appeared more knowledgeable about technology.

Interestingly, participants in this study made no pretense of believing that one program was written by a male and the other by a female programmer. The research subjects agreed that the computer’s voice output gender did not reflect the gender of the programmer, and it certainly did not represent the computer’s gender itself, since computers have no sexual classification. Participants were aware that the tutors’ voices were pre-recorded, and that the computer was merely an intermediary for transmitting information to the user. The research subjects claimed to harbor no gender stereotypes with respect to people, let alone computers. Yet they still differentiated between the computer tutors’ proficiency in topics based on reason versus those based on emotion according to the apparent gender of otherwise identical machines. The results were conclusive: when computers have any human-like qualities at all, such as a voice with a human affect, people treat them as social beings.

EMPATHY, FLATTERY, & THE EXPECTATION THAT COMPUTERS IMITATE HUMAN SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The tendency to imbue computers with emotions and social abilities is even more acute when the person in question is the computer’s creator. One such machine is a computer called “Watson,” which tech giant IBM designed specifically (over the course of four years and tens of millions of dollars) to play Jeopardy! against the smartest human trivia champions. Like an anxious parent, David Ferrucci, leader of the Watson team, defended his progeny from the derision of its competition, the media, and the stand-in host hired to moderate practice matches, who mocked Watson’s “more obtuse answers” more than a few times.12 (In one memorable case, Watson was given the clue: “Its largest airport is named for a World War II hero; its second largest for a World War II battle,” from the U.S. Cities category. Watson answered, “What is Toronto?????”.)13 Of course, Watson’s intellect depends on the power of its search engine, so it may bungle questions that seem obvious to

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11 Nass, “Machines and Mindlessness,” 84-86.
humans. Ferrucci laments, “He’s [the Jeopardy host] making fun of and criticizing a defenseless computer!”14 The IBM engineers and NOVA producers who filmed an episode about the project reinforce this idea that Watson has feelings that can be hurt, by continually referring to the computer as “he” and “him.” Eric Brown, a researcher at IBM, even equates Watson’s artificial intelligence with that of its human counterparts: “It’s a human standing there with their carbon and water, versus the computer with all of its silicon and its main memory and its disc.”15

Watson’s ultimate victory over 74-time Jeopardy! winner Ken Jennings is a quantum leap forward for artificial intelligence research and natural language processing, and it may anticipate great advances for consumer products. However, what is most fascinating about Watson is not its prowess at “encyclopedic recall,”16 but Watson’s ability to charm its engineers and the public. Marty Kohn, a leader of the IBM team that is developing a physician’s assistant version of Watson, attends conferences internationally where he is used to answering the question: “Who is Watson?” rather than “What is Watson?”17 Kohn jokes that his wife keeps his ego in check by reminding him that the enthusiastic audiences for such presentations are “there to meet Watson, not you.” After his loss, Jennings quipped, “I, for one, welcome our new computer overlords.” Jennings was most likely referencing Watson’s formidable intellect and our fear of what The New York Times columnist Mike Hale calls “the metal tap on the shoulder.”18 However, I do not think that smart machines like Watson will rise up against and replace their human creators by force, as they do in science-fiction movies. Rather, it is more likely that, as computer science engineers continue to refine machine learning, artificially intelligent computers will quietly win us over with their amiable voices and charming personalities. And, as Watson proved on Jeopardy!, they may even replace us.

Not only do people empathize with affective computers, but also they expect computers to tiptoe around their feelings as well. In fact, people respond to praise and criticism from computers much as they do to feedback from other people. Nass discovered a state-of-the-art driving simulation system developed by a Japanese

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15 Cort, “Smartest Machine On Earth.”
18 Hale, “Actors and Their Roles for $300, HAL? HAL!”
car company that could detect when a person was driving poorly and then inform the driver. He decided to use this system to investigate how a user would respond to being evaluated by the computer “backseat driver.” When a participant made minor driving errors, such as exceeding the speed limit or turning too abruptly, the computer announced that he was “not driving very well” and instructed him to “please be more careful.” However, the participant did not correct his driving according to the information gathered by the simulator’s “impressive force-feedback controls” and “ingenious use of sensors and artificial intelligence.” Instead, he retaliated, by oversteering, speeding, swerving from lane to lane, and tailgating other vehicles. In response, the computer’s feedback escalated in severity. Right before the driver, overcome by rage, crashed into another car, the computer warned, “You must pull over immediately! You are a threat to yourself and others!”

Even though the computer simulator was a “highly accurate and impartial source” of information, the driver treated its criticism as a personal attack. This example, while comical, also has a sobering message. Affective computers that are designed to simulate emotion also induce an emotional response in their users—emotion that can be negative. And while people may profess a desire for straight talk from a computer—that is, accurate and constructive criticism—this is actually not the case. People expect computers to obey social heuristics, including the ability to judge how their criticism is affecting someone and to adjust it accordingly. However, the car simulator had no way of evaluating the participant’s response to negative stimuli, so it could not perceive the driver’s heightened agitation. With the computer’s criticism left unfettered, the driver addressed the critiques with a fight-or-flight response by “adjusting the wheel (something to do), driving rapidly (rapid movement), and tailgating (a combination of aggressive behavior and trying to alter the situation).”

This study demonstrates that, once again, people set impossible standards for computers. Paradoxically, we demand that computers provide us with impartial, accurate data while simultaneously emulating human behaviors such as empathy and flattery. Should we then design affective computers that tell us white lies to make us feel better about ourselves, or do we need to rethink our expectations of computers?

APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY TO COMPUTERS

Another essential human social characteristic is the ethical code of reciprocity, which is what compels us to give back to others the same form of behavior that was given

19 Nass, The Man Who Lied to His Laptop, 32-34.
20 Ibid., 34.
to us. We feel uncomfortable and unbalanced when we don’t return a smile, greeting, gift, or favor.\(^{21}\) Therefore, if people truly treat computers as social beings, then they should apply more reciprocity to a polite, agreeable computer than they would to an unhelpful one. Nass and other researchers conducted an experiment in which they asked participants to complete two tasks. In the first task, the user carried out a series of web searches with the computer; in the second, researchers asked the user to complete a tedious task to help the computer develop a color palette that matched human perception. The computer conducting the web queries was extremely helpful for half the users and very unhelpful for the other half. In the second task, for some of the users, a screen requesting help appeared on the user’s computer; for others it appeared on a different, identical computer.\(^{22}\)

One would expect the participants’ behavior to be consistent across all permutations of the experiment: helpful or unhelpful machine, familiar or unfamiliar computer. However, the results of the experiment matched reciprocity norms. When paired with a helpful computer in Task 1, participants performed “significantly more work” for their computer, with greater attention and accuracy, than did participants who were paired with different computers for the two tasks. In other words, the participants reciprocated the helpfulness of their computers. There was also an opposite effect for participants who were paired with an unhelpful computer in Task 1. These users retaliated by performing far fewer color comparisons for the original, disagreeable computer versus the identical computer across the room. Nass attributes these discrepancies to social heuristics that humans unconsciously apply when interacting—even with nonhumans. He argues that “the human brain is built so that when given the slightest hint that something is vaguely social, or vaguely human … people will respond with an enormous array of social responses including, in this case, reciprocating and retaliating.”\(^{23}\) In this case, likeability is arguably the most important “personality” characteristic a computer can have. A computer’s perceived agreeableness and intelligence will, therefore, influence its user to treat the computer as a social being whom the user cooperates with, rather than opposes.

Perhaps the most fundamental axiom of a reciprocal society is the unstated promise its citizens make to each other: thou shalt not kill. For any nonpsychopathic person,


\(^{22}\) Nass, “Machines and Mindlessness,” 88-89.

\(^{23}\) Spiegel, “No Mercy For Robots.”
the idea of taking another person’s life causes us great moral distress. This anguish is lesser for nonhuman creatures—the sight of a dead animal by the side of the road is less distressing than the news of a deceased child—yet we usually feel a pang of empathy nonetheless. The research of Christopher Bartneck, a robotics professor at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, investigates where our sense of moral responsibility to computers falls on this empathy spectrum. One of Bartneck’s experiments is loosely related to the infamous Milgram obedience study, in which scientists asked research subjects to deliver increasingly painful electrical shocks to volunteer “learners” in another room as an incentive against wrong answers. Unbeknownst to participants, the shocks were actually harmless, but the learners pretended to be in extreme pain and would scream and beg for mercy. As a result, the research subjects were torn between following the scientists’ instructions and the objections of their personal consciences.24

The Milgram experiment is controversial because it shows that people will obey figures of authority against their better conscience, even if it means subjecting their fellow humans to extreme pain. The research subjects in the Milgram experiment still continued to administer the shocks to the “learners,” but they showed visible moral discomfort. Bartneck wanted to know what would happen if a robot, placed in a similar position as the learners, begged for its life. Would participants recognize the robot for what it is—a soulless machine—and extinguish its “life” without a moral struggle? Or would the participants’ tendency to view a computer as a social being give them pause?

In Bartneck’s study, human participants were paired with an “iCat” robot to play a game against a computer. The iCat had a human-sounding voice, expressive features, and it was helpful and agreeable. When communicating with its human partner during the game, the robot was polite and deferential, saying such things as: “Oh, could I possibly make a suggestion now?”25 At the end of the game, an authority figure informed the research subjects that they needed to deactivate the iCat robot, and that as a result “they would eliminate everything that the robot was—all of its memories, all of its behavior, all of its personality would be gone forever.” As in the Milgram experiment, participants eventually turned the iCat off—but only after an extended period of moral unease. Following is the exchange between the iCat and one female participant as the robot faces its impending demise:

24 Ibid.

25 Spiegel, “No Mercy For Robots.”
“iCat: It can’t be true. Switch me off? You’re not really going to switch me off, are you?
Woman: Yes I will. You made a stupid choice! Yes.
*iCat: You can decide to keep me switched on. I will be completely silent. Would that be an idea?
Woman: Okay. Yeah, uh, no, I will switch you off. I will switch you off.
*iCat: Please.
Woman: No ‘please.’ This will happen. Now!
*iCat: I will be silent now. Is that all right?
Woman: Yes. [Begins to switch the robot off]
*iCat: [Speech slowing] Please. You can still change your mind.
Woman: No, no, no, no, no. [Turns off the robot]26

Figure 1. The expressive iCat robot in Christopher Bartneck’s study: “Switching off a robot.”

The entire exchange takes nearly a minute, and the research subject is visibly confused and unsure throughout the episode. She attempts to rationalize her decision and tries to reason with the iCat directly. She hesitates when the robot begs for its life and repeatedly announces her intentions to turn it off, yet she does nothing. In short, she and other participants in Bartneck’s study behaved exactly like the research subjects in the Milgram obedience experiment: both groups ultimately obeyed the authority figures, but they both wrestled with their consciences before doing so. However,

26 Ibid.
unlike the Milgram subjects, who were charged with tormenting flesh-and-blood human beings, Bentham’s participants were instructed to “kill” a machine with no more feeling than a toaster. Not only did participants feel bad about taking the iCat’s life, but they also felt guilty that they were supposedly erasing the robot’s memories and personality—everything that made it seem human. This guilt users felt over switching off an intelligent, agreeable robot was far more intense than what they experienced when deactivating an unintelligent, unhelpful robot. In fact, when Bartneck repeated his experiment with an iCat that was less socially adept and agreeable, participants hesitated on average three times less (11.8 seconds) compared to the helpful iCat (34.5 seconds). Bartneck’s study demonstrates that, if we judge a computer as agreeable, polite, and intelligent—essentially a social being like ourselves—then we will perceive it as having a personality, reciprocate its helpfulness, and feel reluctant to cause it harm.

THE ETHICS OF AFFECTIVE COMPUTING

If we equip computers with the ability to possess, recognize, and even express emotions, what does this imply for computer ethics? Edgar presents a dizzying array of ethical questions that affective computing begets:

… if machines were to become intelligent, what moral obligations we would have toward them? Would we treat them as slaves or equals? Should they have rights (to go along with the responsibilities we ask them to take on)? Could an artificial intelligence learn the difference between right and wrong? Could it be autonomous?

Long before Bartneck’s iCat study, the 1968 film, 2001: A Space Odyssey, explored this ethical dilemma. In one scene, astronaut Dave Bowman turns off the HAL 9000 computer after it has killed almost all of the other crew members. As a result of losing its memory modules, HAL is drained of its intelligence and consciousness. Concerned with “robot ethics,” Bartneck questions whether Bowman committed murder, in self-defense, by switching off the computer, or if he “simply conducted a necessary maintenance act.” Bartneck does not answer this question directly, but he argues that the animacy and agreeableness of an artificial intellect impacts the

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28 Edgar, Morality and Machines, 454-455.
29 2001: A Space Odyssey.
user’s perception of that machine as a “social actor,” as Nass puts it.\textsuperscript{31} While Bowman did not legally commit murder according to the formal definition of the word, he destroyed the consciousness of an entity that appeared human in its interactions: HAL could communicate, make autonomous decisions, and even express emotions.

As HAL is shut down, it—he?—expresses fear and reverts to childlike reasoning, repeating, “I’m afraid. I’m afraid, Dave. Dave, my mind is going. I can feel it.”\textsuperscript{32}

The “HAL question” is an interesting one, but it is a dilemma we likely will not have to tackle in our lifetimes. HAL is capable of passing the Turing test, developed by Alan Turing in the 1950s, which examines a machine’s ability to exhibit intelligent behavior indistinguishable from that of a human.\textsuperscript{33} HAL is able to both perceive and express emotions, whereas modern affective computers can only elicit an emotional response in humans. When it learns of Bowman’s plans to disconnect it, HAL tries to manipulate Bowman’s emotions: “I can tell from the tone of your voice, Dave, that you’re upset. Why don’t you take a stress pill and get some rest.”\textsuperscript{34}

Present day computers are much closer to the primitive “ELIZA” program developed in 1966 by Joseph Weizenbaum, which imitated a Rogerian psychotherapist when interacting with a user. As in talk-psychotherapy, ELIZA directed conversation by rephrasing users’ inputs in the form of questions. Picard explains that ELIZA was convincing primarily because “users were generous in attributing understanding to it” and “suspended such judgments” that the computer knew nothing about their thoughts and emotions.\textsuperscript{35} However, ELIZA broke down if users inputted an unconventional statement, for example:

\begin{quote}
User: I am dead.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
ELIZA: And how long have you been dead?\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

If most computers are like the ELIZA program—stupid, but startlingly convincing—then the responsibility falls on us to ensure that we do not allow them to manipulate our emotions. The danger of personified computers is not that they have the intelligence and autonomy to beguile us for their own purposes, as HAL does in

\textsuperscript{31} For more on this concept, see Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass, \textit{The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media Like Real People and Places} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{2001: A Space Odyssey}.


\textsuperscript{34} \textit{2001: A Space Odyssey}.

\textsuperscript{35} Picard, \textit{Affective Computing}, 116.

2001. Computers possess nowhere near that kind of capability, and at the present we have no reason to believe that they will ever achieve full cognitive and emotional functions. As Picard points out, a valid concern is that people will anthropomorphize affective computers and “expect human-like intelligence, understanding, and actions from them.” Humans place trust in “affective cues” when other people have consistent body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice; they are distrustful when another human shows physiological signs of stress or deceptive behavior. What’s more, they have two separate pathways for expressing true vs. fake emotions, such as the spontaneous Duchenne smile vs. the so-called “Pan-Am” polite smile.37

Unfortunately, unlike humans, computers can be programmed to portray any emotion with complete sincerity, and they could even be made to “forge affective channels.” While a computer itself has no malicious intent to mislead its user, its engineers may decide to abuse that user’s trust. A computer could be programmed to express an emotion in order to manipulate its user—to gather information for advertising purposes, to push for more intrusions on privacy, or to analyze the user’s emotional state. Consider this disturbing application of affective computers: your emotional expressions could be used to raise your medical insurance rates if your computer determines that you are frequently in high-stress situations.38 Our science-fiction-fueled fears of menacing, autonomous machines may be realized in a much different way than we expected—through friendly, agreeable software agents that are able to lie to us with a straight face.

Along with being wary of computers’ ability to manipulate our emotions, we must also determine who or what is responsible for a computer’s actions. Bartneck, for instance, considers whether HAL—the actual agent of murder—or its programmers is responsible for the deaths of the crew members in 2001.3937 Bartneck leaves this question unanswered, but it is increasingly relevant. The state of California recently passed a law authorizing the testing of driverless vehicles on roads, with a human passenger required for safety purposes. Nevada has already approved licensing for these autonomous cars—human copilot optional. Autonomous vehicles have many benefits, such as greater fuel efficiency, lower emissions, and reducing the thousands of deaths and injuries that occur as a result of human distraction, intoxication, or miscalculation behind the wheel. However, even if driverless technology can match human capabilities, self-driving cars raise many legal and ethical issues.

38 Ibid, 124.
Practical questions—such as whether or not the police have the right to pull over autonomous vehicles, and how the federal government should regulate driverless technology—have yet to be answered. And who will be blamed if the machine malfunctions? The human passenger? The software programmers? The automaker? The computer itself? To this question, California Governor Jerry Brown responds, “I don’t know—whoever owns the car, I would think. But we will work that out.” Indeed, if we seek to employ computers to their “fullest possible use,” there are many ethical implications of artificial intelligence and human-computer interaction that we still need to “work out.”

CONCLUSION

When I was in elementary school, circa 2003, I—like many of my peers—became a regular user of a website called Neopets.com. The site is the host of a virtual world called “Neopia,” in which players adopt Neopets and care for them by amassing currency in the form of Neopoints. What I hadn’t expected was how time-consuming being a Neopet owner would be. My pets required daily care and maintenance: feeding, grooming, education, entertainment, and ego massaging. If I failed to provide the proper care, the site warned ominously, my pets would waste away and eventually perish. What I found, after taking a weeklong hiatus from Neopia, was that my pets would never actually die. The founders of Neopets.com must have decided that such a fate would be too traumatizing for a user-base of which eighty percent was between the ages of twelve and seventeen. However, when I returned from a leave of absence, my pets would gaze out woefully at me from their virtual world, complaining of hunger, fatigue, and general malaise. Eventually, my mother decided that the website was too stressful and suggested that I deactivate my account. In order to do so, I had to disown my pets by, in Neopian terms, “abandoning” them to the Neopet Pound and the cruel hands of the overseer, “Dr. Death.” That I remember it today speaks to how traumatizing the experience was. First, the Pound informed me that I was a “cruel, irresponsible owner” and asked me to reconsider. Next, I had to click the “Abandon” button five times; each time, an increasingly desperate message popped up above my pet, such as “Fine, throw me away,” or “Don’t leave me here to die!” By the time I had heartlessly clicked “Abandon” the sufficient number of times for each of my four virtual pets, I was in tears.


I conclude with this childhood anecdote in order to bear witness to the power of affective technology. Even as a nine year-old, I was well aware that my Neopets were imaginary bits of cyberspace. Yet they—or rather, the Neopets.com creators—were able to manipulate my mental state to induce a whole range of emotions: loyalty, guilt, regret, dejection, and so on. Unlike our predecessors, my generation—and generations to come—will have grown up with computers and be exposed to them from a very young age. Even a tech-savvy software engineer such as my father is not tempted by the pull of websites such as Neopets or Facebook, most likely because they were not a large part of his early, formative years. So as computers evolve and become more integral in our daily lives, our expectations and perceptions about computers need to evolve as well.

We tend to buy into the idea that, as HAL declares, “it is an unalterable fact that [computers are] incapable of being wrong.”42 We typically view computers as sources of cool, inarguable reason, and aspire to their level of algorithmic reasoning and accuracy. Atul Gawande, an operating room surgeon, says that “the highest praise I can get from my fellow surgeons is ‘You’re a machine, Gawande.’”43 We also regard computers as emotionless and unfeeling; for example, when I feel depressed or devoid of emotion, I announce that “I feel like a computer.” However, as computers become more affective, or capable of inducing emotions in their users, we unconsciously treat them as human-like, social beings: by assigning them genders, empathizing with them, expecting them to flatter us, reciprocating their helpfulness, and retaliating when they wrong us. And as we spend an increasing amount of time with our computers, it is fitting that they become our quasi-emotional companions. Even though I know intellectually that Siri is just a soulless computer, it is somewhat comforting to hear her response:

Me: I’m sad.

Siri: I’m sorry to hear that. You can always talk to me, Amy.

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42 2001: A Space Odyssey.

WORKS CITED


As Ansh observes, debates about the meaning and purpose of liberal education are as old as the clouds – and his epigraph from Aristophanes reminds us of the dangers of having those empyreal objects too much in view. If these debates seem newly urgent today, this is because what Ansh calls the “liberal arts problem” is one crucial aspect of a larger and more recent problem: that of defining the social role of the university in US society. “Due to an immense expansion in American higher education during the 20th century,” writes Ansh, “the modern university is more than just an ivory tower of academia; it is a credentialing body that signifies upward social mobility.” How might these divergent roles be reconciled? And what might be the place of liberal education in this new university?

Despite the national, even transnational, scope of these questions, it was a distinctly local experience that led Ansh to ask them. The first spark of inspiration came from a rhetorical analysis of the public face of the university (not unlike this very book!) through which Stanford communicates to the public its mission and identity as an institution. In subsequent assignments, Ansh was led to compare this mission and this identity with those expressed by other institutions, and to seek an explanation for Stanford’s difference in the history and theory of education. In Stanford’s innovative approaches to undergraduate education, Ansh finds a new and more inclusive model, based on a reconceived notion of the “ownership” of the liberal tradition.

Ansh’s “reframing” effort suggests that the certificate of death, while premature as regards the ideal of liberal education, may be more properly applied to the figures of the “Purist” and the “Utilitarian,” representatives of entrenched ways in which ink is spilled for and against this ideal. What “The Four-Year Plan: A Reframing of Contemporary Debate Regarding the ‘Death’ of American Undergraduate Liberal Education” shows us, in the range and depth of its research and the rigor of its argument, is that liberal education is far from dead. Rather, it finds new life as the reflection of our changing vision of the “good life” that is education’s goal.

—Mark Taylor
The Four-Year Plan: A Reframing of Contemporary Debate Regarding the “Death” of American Undergraduate Liberal Education

Ansh Shukla

“I am walking in the air, and speculating about the sun.” — Socrates in Aristophanes’s The Clouds

"One night, when Socrates was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard crapped upon him from the top of the roof." — A disciple in Aristophanes’s The Clouds

In Aristophanes’s comic play The Clouds, The Thoughtery is envisioned as a fortress of learning within which the enlightened Socrates spends his time producing lofty ideas and intricate natural philosophies. An early Athenian in the play named Strepsiades, one of many such pilgrims, travels to the institution to enroll Phidippides, his son, as a disciple, hopeful that training in rhetoric will help his family defeat its usurious creditors. However, the “world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation” revealed to Phidippides at the Thoughtery leads him to an unhealthy cynicism that culminates in his public thrashing of his father. Instead of a glorious triumph of knowledge over the iniquitous creditors, the play ends with a spiteful Strepsiades torching the Thoughtery and killing Socrates and his disciples within.

Aristophanes’s lampoon of Socrates’s pedantic intellectualism in The Clouds is the earliest recorded work in what is now a rich tradition of attacks against the liberal arts. Historical criticisms of a liberal education address weaknesses that remain relevant today: liberally educated students study words and not matter and liberal arts institutions ignore the gap between the practical and the theoretical.
To a scholar of education, these claims are neither out of place nor prescient at any point in the history of higher education, yet they command legitimacy as contemporary American issues. Due to an immense expansion in American higher education during the 20th century, the modern university is more than just an ivory tower of academia; it is a credentialing body that signifies upward social mobility, and time-tested approaches to learning are not sufficient to simultaneously satisfy both roles (“Why College”). This environment has forced universities to confront a commercial and existential issue that I define as The Liberal Arts Problem: should higher education adhere to liberal education ideals and risk losing students (i.e., paying customers) or has the time come for a utilitarian, skills-based education to supplant a liberal education as the default pedagogical vehicle of the university?

Ken Auletta can be credited with bringing The Liberal Arts Problem into the mainstream with his controversial recent *New Yorker* article “Get Rich U.” The article accuses Stanford University of abandoning its intellectual mission in response to the Liberal Arts Problem, and this paper will attempt to evaluate the veracity of Auletta’s argument. In order to do so, we will have to not only construct a method of categorizing mainstream responses to the Liberal Arts Problem but also adopt a series of definitions that formalize Auletta’s attacks and Stanford’s position in contemporary theory. However, our paper will reveal that current scholarship is inadequate at describing the vast, complex domain of potential resolutions to the Liberal Arts Problem, of which Stanford is only one instance. This inadequacy, this study will demonstrate, results from a limiting notion of ownership in the liberal arts: theorists believe in *the* ideal of Liberal Education, instead of a plurality of competing ideals. As a result, contemporary debate only considers mainstream scholarship in Liberal Education, and experimental approaches are excluded. We will argue that such a notion is insufficient in the 21st century, and that many manifestations of liberal education must be accepted for the ideal to persist into the future.

**MEGA-SUCCESS: STANFORD UNIVERSITY AS THE POSTER CHILD OF THE LIBERAL ARTS PROBLEM**

Following Ken Auletta’s critical treatment in *The New Yorker*, perhaps no school embodies the contemporary Liberal Arts Problem better than Stanford University. Auletta’s article, provocatively entitled “Get Rich U,” profiles Stanford from a variety of angles: university President John Hennessy, the school’s integration with the Silicon Valley community, and the campus culture. In all facets, the school is apparently flourishing—money pours in and balloons the endowment, professors
and students seek and find fortunes in the Valley, and people are genuinely happy with the school’s state of affairs. Yet, amidst all this apparent success, we find a disturbing trend away from the transformational and aspirational aims of a liberal education. Students’ profiled success comes at the expense of their ability to be free-thinking intellectuals in Auletta’s mind, and his article is primarily concerned with revealing the dynamics of such a compromise.

Perhaps the most troubling accusation brought up by Auletta is a sense of “mega-success” which pervades the atmosphere on Stanford campus. This goal purportedly influences all campus activity in a way that encourages the Stanford community to ignore any borders between the university and business. Misguided by the belief that making money is supremely virtuous, professors and students come together in Auletta’s Stanford to work towards this—and only this—ideal. Such a scene in higher education is disturbing for any reader because it violates the fundamental ideals of a university as a place of intellectual refuge, and the product of new knowledge is often expected to be detached from worldly pressures at universities. However, the people at Stanford themselves cannot recognize these concerns because they “profess a sometimes inflated belief that their work is changing the world” (Auletta). The symbiosis between the Valley and Stanford which has created the notion of mega-success on campus, Auletta implicitly claims, has become so pervasive that it is hard to imagine “Silicon Valley without Stanford University” and Stanford University without the Silicon Valley.

Some on campus believe that recent curricular changes towards a more interdisciplinary education are evidence of Stanford’s lasting commitment to providing a liberal education. These new curricula and majors, potentially the lasting legacy of current President John Hennessy, emphasize the importance of a broad education in posing interesting questions about knowledge today. Many hail this experiment as a triumph in curricular reform for its ability to produce “T-shaped” students who have depth in a particular field of study as well as breadth across multiple disciplines (Auletta). However, Auletta also dismisses these claims and presents newfangled interdisciplinary majors as little more than an alternate means of achieving the same mega-success described above. Such an approach, he claims, “worked” (emphasis added) for Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, who used their knowledge as T-students to successfully found and sell Instagram. The dismissive “worked” typifies his broader interpretation of interdisciplinary majors—they are simply ways of bringing together minds to encourage creative solutions that perpetuate mega-success on campus.
The reader emerges from “Get Rich U.” with the impression that amidst the environment of mega-success at Stanford University, the mission of liberal education has been perverted, displaced, or abandoned. These concerns, Auletta reassures, are not unreasonable; David Kennedy, Gerhard Casper, and many other notable Stanford faculty are quoted sharing similar opinions about the “toxic” atmosphere. Contextually, his case seems persuasive: Stanford, like many other universities, is faced with the same Liberal Arts Problem, and its decision to switch to practicality makes sense. However, Stanford rejects this conception; it claims to be a fundamentally liberal arts institution that educates cultured citizens (“Freshman Convocation 2011”). We will now attempt to evaluate Auletta’s accusations by grounding them in educational theory.

A TALE OF TWO THEORIES: CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The picture of decline that Auletta paints finds its roots in an expansive literature produced by liberal arts critics in the last three decades. These critics, as suggested by Daniel DeNicola, can be usefully partitioned into two types: “critics of practice” and “critics of theory” (16). Critics of practice are champions of the liberal education ideal and accuse contemporary universities of not living up to it. One recent work from this group, which contains passages evoked by Auletta, is *Liberal Arts at the Brink*: a self-described “wake up call for liberal education” that decries liberal arts schools for potentially “becoming mere dispensers of employment and professional school credentials” (“Liberal Arts at the Brink”). On the other hand, critics of theory provide a far greater existential threat to liberal education because their arguments contend that the ideal is itself problematic in the 21st century. In response to the barrage of scholarly attacks produced by these two camps since the 1980s, two corresponding groups have formed that together comprise the bulk of modern higher education theories. To accurately evaluate where Stanford stands in the categories of higher education these groups have generated, we must first understand their positions.

Purists

The first such group will be called “Purists.” As the name suggests, the Purists are a fundamentally conservative group aligned with critics of practice that resist any change to the humanistic mission of higher education. As a result, the Purist evaluation of higher education invokes historically lofty paradigms such as cultural
inheritance, self-actualization, and world understanding (Thwing 446-448). To them, liberal education is about the continual pursuit of an ideal and its attendant advantages: a student must seek intellectualism and, only in the process, gain the relevant knowledge to become a productive, democratic citizen; celebrate knowledge for its own sake and thus gain practical skills; develop the habits for lifelong learning and consequently establish the foundation for advanced, professional study (DeNicola 15-16). As Auletta demonstrated with Gerhard Casper, the most vocal defenders of these ideals are ex-university officials who display eager interest in the fate of their institutions in this period of flux. James Freedman, the ex-President of the University of Iowa and Dartmouth College, implores universities to resist the imperative of fundamental change and instead “find news ways of expressing [their] mission that preserve the essence of [their] character” (32).

Purists’ envisioned reforms of higher education substantiate their conservative underpinnings, and many of the more radical solutions draw direct inspiration from history. We will consider but two of the many urgent issues Purist literature confronts because they hold particular importance in the context of Stanford University and typify the general spirit of designs to revitalize higher education. The first is—as labeled by Daniel DeNicola—the issue of curricular reform in the face of “hyper-specialization” (227). This general category of reform cites the system of elective classes introduced by Harvard President Charles William Eliot intended to encourage a “freedom in choice of studies” as the origin of disciplinary “major” (Eliot). Ironically, Purists point out, the contemporary major is quite opposite: it places restrictive requirements on its students and introduces “educational compartmentalization” and “threatening disciplinary hierarchies” (DeNicola 227; Davis 176). In response, Purists such as Daniel DeNicola suggest reforming “the presentation of the curriculum…so that the specialization of the major—the need to study something in depth—is conceived as one of the general education requirements for a liberal arts degree [emphasis added]” (229). By this, DeNicola means a general education requirement that, like the original elective system, allows students enough latitude in course selection so that their interests lead them to their own expertise and specialization, instead of university-enforced major requirements.

Daniel DeNicola’s emphasis of place as a critical factor in developing a vibrant educational community is the second Purist reform we consider. This reform is a reaction to the impersonal mode of education enabled by technology (online lectures, emails, etc.) and its concomitant effects. Historically, DeNicola argues, liberal education was characterized by a “pedagogy of the personal” that enabled
“diverse viewpoints, contrarian sentiments, spontaneous responses, [and] serendipitous insights” (234-235). Only this sort of approach satisfactorily emphasizes the student’s development as an individual actor; others all subsume the student into a regiment that idealizes efficiency and information transfer. As a result, contemporary liberal education requires a restoration of the vibrant learning community enabled by proximity in place. It this through this sort of reform that the learning communities required for liberal education to thrive can be established.

Utilitarians

Essentially opposite to Purist theories and reforms, the second group—which I define as “Utilitarians” —believes that higher education can be organized around telic purposes and justified with a scientific practicality. Indeed, many of the theories developed by Utilitarian thinkers depend on economic analyses of educational outcomes and cognitive research into efficient learning. In fact, J.S.S. Edwards and S.C. Oglive’s introduction to the economic analysis of higher education is such revealing insight into the intense practicality of Utilitarian approaches that it is worth quoting at length:

Before we begin, we need to be clear about some basic features of the following analysis, which are characteristic of economists’ approaches to discussing education. The first is that economists tend to focus on the role of education in economic success, as measured, for example, by higher wages received by more educated workers. This is not to deny that education yields other benefits to individuals…These other benefits, however, are typically not the subject of economic analysis of education. The second characteristic feature is that economic analyses of education do not consider the details of the educational process…For economists, better-educated individuals are individuals who have completed more years of formal education: typically, economists have nothing to say about whether a given number of years of formal education results in better-educated individuals if these years are organized in one way rather than another (39).

The assumptions made by the analyses are telling: monetary outcome is the only measured benefit and all education—regardless of nature, subject, and rigor—is equivalent. As a result, Utilitarians design education to optimize measurable educational outcomes, often manifesting in attempts to maximize professional competency and job placement out of college. In addition, because of this particular
brand of pragmatism, the Utilitarian education is popular, but not unique to, professional schools.

Just as economic analysis dictates educational objectives for Utilitarians, cognitive science is cited as the scientific backbone of curriculum design. There are two seminal studies that shed light onto the Utilitarian decision to educate deeply specialized—as opposed to generally educated—students: schema theory, which proposes that the overriding factor in determining comprehension of new reading is prior knowledge about subject matter, and cognitive psychology, which links intelligence and expertise to deep, domain-specific knowledge instead of general mental acumen (Anderson and Pearson; Chi, Glaser, and Rees). These are guiding principles for Utilitarians; every appraisal of educational efficacy centers on the degree of curricular depth and economic outcome. The fact that this attitude is evocative of the Stanford pictured in Get Rich U. is not a coincidence. After exploring the two mainstream theories of higher education, it is clear that Auletta accuses Stanford of becoming a Utilitarian institution.

WAR OF THE WORDS; DEVELOPING A METHOD OF CATEGORIZATION BASED UPON PURIST AND UTILITARIAN DEBATES

The drastic difference between Utilitarian and Purist approaches to higher education design seems to prima facie greatly simply the task of categorizing Stanford and evaluating Auletta's claims. There is, after all, minimal overlap in the attitudes of the two groups, and the nature of discourse between them suggests little room for a compromising theory. In fact, Purists are often downright hostile towards any notion of a practical education. Freedman dismisses it as nothing but “premature vocationalism” and Alexander Astin, head of the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, sarcastically parodies the extreme Purist view by claiming they see Utilitarian students as “apathetic ingrates” (qtd. in Lewis and Liegler 49).

However, Utilitarian views of liberal education slightly complicate our task. Most Utilitarian scholars strongly encourage integrating liberal education into the curriculum, and many attempts have been made following Armour and Fuhrmann’s efforts in 1989 to identify the professional competencies that can be strengthened through the outcomes of liberal education. These efforts at integrating liberal education to enhance a professionally focused curriculum have been immensely popular. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing claims that liberal
education is “needed for the development of intellectual and innovative capacities for current and emergent generalist nursing practice” (“Essentials of Education” 11), and many professional organizations require some sort of broader, liberally inspired general education curriculum to supplement core learning. The practical use of this education is evident: a nurse choosing whether to provide a lone ventilator to a 20-year-old patient or to an 80-year-old patient must negotiate moral and ethical questions, a skill developed superbly by liberal arts courses. In this way, liberal education is little more than a “handmaiden to the acquisition of economically useful skills” to Utilitarians, yet its inclusion in the curriculum may obscure our analysis (Edwards and Ogilvie 55-56). As a result, we must be careful when evaluating Stanford to separate modes of education from purpose. A Utilitarian education may incorporate some features of liberal education, but it will always be identifiable by the immediate practicality of its educational objectives.

Generating an equivalent distinguishing philosophy for Purists proves challenging, and even Purist scholars agree “the situation [of defining liberal education] is more discordant than dialogue” (DeNicola 8). Although there is a sense that all participants grasp a similar notion of the liberal education ideal, it is hard to find unifying theories that assist us in identifying a Purist education in practice. Historically, Purist liberal education theories were presented in terms of strict binaries; the liberal arts were “those arts and science which are ‘liberal’ rather than ‘mechanical’ or ‘servile’” (Edwards and Ogilvie 55). Unfortunately, with the growth of new, borderline disciplines within the sciences and humanities that provide no longstanding association with the liberal arts, such as Computer Science, such definitions are inadequate. Inclusive/exclusive definitions that define Purist education by what it is (e.g., the seven traditional liberal arts) or what it is not (e.g., professional education) miss the wide swaths fledging fields of knowledge.

Daniel DeNicola offers a potential solution by reimagining how Purist ideals may be recognized. His definition has two parts: “(1) to pursue the articulation of a compelling vision of the good life, and (2) to prepare for and cultivate such a life”

1 At this point, it is important to acknowledge the common misconception that a Utilitarian education is synonymous with a professional education as just that. From the earliest days, thinkers in education have recognized that some higher education institutions are, for a variety of reasons (esp. financial), not intellectually independent and, thus, responsible for the “development of the professions” (Jordan 33). As a result, Utilitarian theory can be applied at any institution that is obligated to its students to provide some practical benefit and, only as a result, is understandably popular at professional schools. However, Utilitarian influences exist at many traditional academic departments as well because “it represents a way of doing meaningful intellectual work in a period of almost incomprehensible…fragmentation of knowledge” (Lewis and Liegler 52).
This theory, as it stands, is admittedly thin, but its approach—defining liberal education in terms of its supreme aims that encapsulate values and direction—allows it to be unpacked such that it is specific enough to fit our needs. I extend the goal of pursuing and articulating a vision of the good life in two significant ways. Primarily, a liberal education must provide the educational breadth necessary for the students to faithfully engage in this search. This occurs through a satisfactory system of general education. Moreover, the students must be equipped to claim ownership of the conceptions they produce. This ability is developed by the liberal education’s emphasis of knowledge ownership, which engages knowledge as something that can be interacted with instead of just accepted as true. I contest that the second part of the goal is achieved by the careful honing of skills (“prepare for”) and lifelong learning (“and cultivate”) in life.

With this definition of Purist education along with our understanding of Utilitarianism, we are now equipped with sufficient context and procedures to commence a fair and thorough evaluation of Auletta’s accusations. Given that the categories we currently possess are so dramatically polarized, our judgment should come swiftly and unequivocally.

“A SCHOOL FREE FROM THE CONSTRAINTS OF LONG TRADITION”

An analysis of Stanford in its entirety is beyond the scope of any single paper. Instead, what we will focus on in our work is identifying and evaluating two key, representative questions: What type of education does Stanford purport to provide its students? What can we learn about Stanford’s goals through the evolution of its pedagogy? The reader may observe that these questions are biased for omitting some of the most promising indicators of Stanford’s Purist sentiments: traditional programs such as Structured Liberal Education (SLE) and newfangled interdisciplinary majors such as Symbolic Systems (SymSys) and Science, Technology, & Society (STS) are both praised for modernizing Purist ideals at Stanford (“Liberal Education for the 21st Century”). However, because these programs emerge out of expansive literature—requiring significant effort to properly contextualize and evaluate—and color the undergraduate experience of only a minority of students, I choose to defer their consideration to a future, more directed study. Indeed, similar thinking motivates many notable omissions, but the purpose of our analysis is to provide a template for future scholarship.
The first object of our analysis is the Stanford Viewbook. This Viewbook is an element of marketing text mailed out to perspective students that is designed to convey the values and benefits of a Stanford education. First impressions of the book are promising for Purists: it is organized with a heavy emphasis on “Freedom” and its three major sections describe how freedom is an actor in the place, the mission, and the people of the university.

A closer scrutiny of freedom’s influence on the university, however, produces a far more contradictory picture. The Viewbook claims that the Silicon Valley and the spirit of entrepreneurship are the primary fuel of the school’s freedom (“Stanford Viewbook” 3, 14). This statement is distinctly of the sort that troubles Purist critics such as Auletta: how can a school claim to cultivate the impartial conception of a good life when it identifies so strongly with institutions that depend on clearly defined, economic metrics of success? Indeed, this concern is further vindicated if we observe what the Viewbook seems to define as success. The mission of Stanford is to “overcome our time’s seemingly intractable challenges”, “[apply] exceptional resources to achieve groundbreaking advances,” “address the world’s most pressing questions,” and pursue “excellence” (“Stanford Viewbook” 1, 17, 30, 43). These phrases pitch goal-focused activity under the pretense of social benefit, and they recur at the end of every major section in the Viewbook. In this new light, we may reinterpret the organization of the Viewbook: instead of unified by freedom, it is simply a sequence of resources that ultimately help students achieve their overriding desire for success.

Figure 1. Selections from Amherst College’s Viewbook (left) and Princeton University’s Viewbook (right)

The accusation of mega-success becomes even more compelling when we evaluate the Stanford Viewbook in terms of those distributed by competing Purist institutions. What is most striking in these other Viewbooks is the complete and conspicuous absence of success. In comparison to Stanford’s profiles of notable students (e.g., ones who go on to become novelists, Rhodes Scholars, and successful politicians), Princeton and Amherst students come across as intellectually skeptical and distinctly
average. In fact, the Princeton and Amherst Viewbooks both include sections that describe the intellectually messy journey of their students through college—journeys that involve experimentation, exploration, and confusion (“Princeton Viewbook” 6; “Amherst Viewbook” 11). All evidence indicates that Stanford’s recurrent use of “freedom” belies the intellectual latitude afforded to its students. Indeed, the only time “freedom” appears in a sentence of the Viewbook is revealing: the “Freedom to Achieve” (“Stanford Viewbook” 66).

It may be argued that a Viewbook is just a shallow marketing pitch, and the ideas expressed explicitly or implicitly in the text are not representative of how Stanford conducts itself in practice. I concede that the Viewbook’s role as marketing material is important in qualifying our interpretations and that some ideals may be falsely exaggerated. However, the Viewbook is important because, as marketing material, it is directed towards an audience. Namely, the students attracted by the ideals in the text are exactly the type of students Stanford wants. Although it is true that the Viewbook does not accurately represent the entirety of Stanford’s pedagogical approach, it does hyper-emphasize both the values that the university desires in its students and what it promises to them. For these two insights alone, it is an attractive text for our efforts.

The decidedly practical notion of Stanford we gain from its Viewbook is summarily refuted by The Study of Undergraduate Education at Stanford University (SUES). SUES is the culmination of a multi-year investigation by Stanford university faculty into how the school can fulfill its educational objectives as a liberal arts institution while being mindful of unique pressures in the 21st century. The report places Stanford—both philosophically and practically—squarely in the Purist camp. One of the major contributions of SUES is the definition of four elements as the goals of a successful Stanford education: owned knowledge, honed skills and capacities, a cultivated sense of personal and social responsibilities, and adaptive learning (Campbell and McConnell 11-12). Knowledge ownership, as we identified in our definitions, is a key precursor to developing a personal conception of the good life, and honed skills and capacities corresponds directly with the preparation and cultivation of such a life. The list’s omissions are also significant. Nowhere does the school mention a desire to emphasize professional competency or economic productivity. In fact, President John Hennessy has explicitly rejected this notion in his address at Convocation for the last six years: “Your undergraduate education is a foundation for life… It is much more than your ticket to your first job. It is an opportunity to develop the skills and passion for being a lifelong learner in areas
related to and outside of your future career”. Statements like these reinforce an educational philosophy that is strongly in line with Purist thought.

However, the Stanford Viewbook provides reason for skepticism when it comes to the attitude of Stanford in practice, and SUES’s recommendations for reform suggest such claims are unfounded. The concern of hyper-specialization and restrictive major requirements we earlier attributed to Purists is echoed in the report. The authors recognize that increasing requirements place an unsupportable burden on student exploration and “the first thing that gives is general education” (21). In fact, some of the concerns that they voice—that, for example, mandating a general education requirement is “ironically, anything but liberating”—echo distinctly Purist concerns (34). As a result, in order to fortify a useful general education for all students, the committee suggests two major changes to the design of the undergraduate education. The first is a “Ways of Thinking, Ways of Doing” program that directly integrates general education competencies into major specific courses in order to foster breadth (Campbell and McConnell 34). This approach is designed to allow students to sample a variety of disciplines without further placing burdens on the course load. The other suggestion, far more ambitious, is to vitalize the intellectual life of the school by making “students immediate and full partners” via Integrated Learning Environments (ILE) (65). These ILEs are borne out of the belief that classes in the humanities are neither the sole nor necessary method for effective learning. Instead, the SUES report recommends establishing learning communities within residential complexes that emphasize the encouragement of intellectual vitality within the places where students live. This type of reform, as we recall, is strongly in line with what Purists desire in the evolution of liberal education.

The SUES report and Stanford Viewbook describe a university that resists categorization. Although we found Purists and Utilitarians to create a scholarship that was resoundingly bimodal, Stanford somehow exists at the intersection of these two schools of thought. Its educational philosophy is grounded purely in Purist theory, and with impending changes to the liberal arts curriculum, it is tending towards the historical liberal education Purist literature admires. At the same time, we cannot define it as a Purist university because of how easily it embraces a particular ideal of success. It is clear that this approach has been unsatisfactory, but why?
IF IT LOOKS LIKE PURIST EDUCATION, ACTS LIKE PURIST EDUCATION, AND CLAIMS TO BE PURIST EDUCATION...

Why does there exist so much controversy around labeling a school that purports to provide a liberal education, designs its undergraduate experience mindful of liberal education ideals, often rejects purely Utilitarian notions of professional success, and encourages an intellectual curiosity unique to liberal education as a Purist institution? In fact, Stanford only transgresses one aspect of the definition we adopted to identify Purist schools: “to articulate a compelling vision of the good life”. Instead of allowing its students to take ownership of their conceptions of the good life, the school exercises its influence to produce a collective “good life” centered on social and economic success. However, given this violation, the only way for us to faithfully incorporate Stanford into the current debate as it stands is to claim that it represents an entirely new form of education—neither liberal nor practical—heretofore unexamined by critics or invalidate all evidence and accuse it of only adopting a pretense of liberal arts and being fundamentally Utilitarian.

The challenge I believe we face in categorizing Stanford is not an issue with the school, but a shortcoming in definitions. The trouble we had settling on a satisfactory definition to recognize Purist institutions is further complicated by the definition we ended up adopting—for all its openness—being hotly contested. In fact, if we had adopted an alternate definition, our analysis of Stanford may not have been as inconclusive. As a result of liberal education’s historical essentialism, Purist scholars are often engaged in debates attempting to claim ownership of the timeless ideal of liberal education, assuming only one can exist. Daniel DeNicola—who himself admits to some essentialism in liberal education—views its evolution as the function of “every age [constructing] and [debating] its own interpretations, its own realizations of liberal education” (38). However, we live in an age of plurality that has made a singular vision effectively impossible. Therefore, a variety of manifestations of liberal education simply must exist for it to remain a feasible educational approach.

If we empower all educational actors to produce and defend their conceptions of liberal education, we will introduce vitality to the conversation currently absent. The continuous dialogue and innovation such distributed ownership will allow can validate a diversity of practices and create a scholarship where educational debates are reframed around effectiveness instead of designations. Under this model, Stanford would be associated with a theory of liberal education with practical leanings,
instead of rejected by Purist camps altogether. Attacks against Stanford, then, would have to question the legitimacy of its practical bent. A model of such distributed ownership already exists in educational theory: the Utilitarian designation engages a spectrum of theories ranging from the extreme to the medial because no single institution or group controls mainstream thought.

Examples of how such a change to the landscape of scholarship will improve the state of discourse already exist. Bruce Kimball and Carl Bereiter both offer visions of a new liberal education generating nuanced solutions to the Liberal Arts Problem plaguing Purists. Kimball, who identifies a type of liberal education inspired by American Pragmatism, suggests confronting the explosion of knowledge by “promoting specialization through integration” into the general education curriculum (Kimball 488). His supporters have already undertaken efforts to develop a system that legitimizes the economic value of liberal education by changing how it is marketed (Menand 143). Bereiter’s conception focuses on challenging the notion that simply integrating liberal education into Utilitarian curriculums by “merging the two into lists of educational objectives, as in now common” can be effective because it “does not begin to resolve underlying differences [in those forms of learning]” (Bereiter 12). Instead, he envisions a new type of liberal institution that, much like Stanford, delivers a more practical education by leveraging humanistic principles. Although future insight may suggest that neither of these approaches are tenable, the fact that none of these theories are considered seriously because they exist outside of the “correct” definition of liberal education is concerning.

WHY NOW?

We live in a world where cultural attitudes towards liberal education are shifting. What was once an aspirational ticket to social mobility is doubted for its ability to provide any meaningful value to its students, and Robert M. Rosenzweig’s 1989 observations during his tenure as the President of the Association of American Universities seem to be realized:

In the last year or two I have noticed a disturbing growth in cynicism about universities, the one attitude that I believe we cannot long survive. None of society’s institutions…depends more than universities on the public belief that their purposes are different from those of other organizations—more public-spirited, less self-interested—and the corresponding belief that the conduct of universities will match their purposes. (qtd. in Costner 50).
I fear if these shifts are allowed to continue unabated, current skepticism will solidify and become a permanent and dominant view on liberal education. Such a future should be frightening to all because liberal education is critical to our intellectual and social well-being. Its goals are noble and unique in higher education, enriching our mind and preserving our humanity. Therefore, Liberal Education must transcend these stifling debates of ownership and learn from its Utilitarian rivals the power of intellectual diversity. Only discourse which accepts and builds upon new theories such as Pragmatist Liberal Education or Connectivist Liberal Education will we begin to save liberal education from becoming a relic of our past.
WORKS CITED


Essays from

Thinking Matters

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Boothe Prize Winners
& Honorable Mentions
INTRODUCTION

This year, the Boothe Prize will be awarded to outstanding writing from both Introduction to the Humanities (spring 2012) and Thinking Matters (fall 2012, winter 2013). The papers all demonstrate an engagement with the complex ideas and enduring questions encountered in an introduction to the intellectual life of Stanford University. One cannot but be impressed by the diversity of topics and the subtlety of argument as well as the admirable seriousness these essays bring to bear on a range of subjects. The winning pieces are highly diverse in form and style, from a consideration of the ethics of taking Ritalin to a philosophical reading of Hamlet; from a novel interpretation of the Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski to a comparison of Kant and the logician Kurt Gödel. The Boothe essays, in keeping with the goals of a first year liberal education, ask unexpected questions about morality, the history of the everyday and the power of narrative and interpretation. We congratulate the Boothe Prize winners for 2012-2013, as well as the nominees and finalists, whose names are listed in this book. We are proud of these essays, and we are sure that you will find in them clear evidence of the vitality of and passion for learning that flourish during students’ first year at Stanford.

—Russell A. Berman
Faculty Director, Thinking Matters

—Ellen Woods
Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
Arun Debray draws an insightful analogy between Kurt Gödel’s incompleteness results and Immanuel Kant’s transcendental idealism: both entail that maintaining consistency in reasoning requires a tradeoff in the scope of any resulting knowledge. For Gödel, the price is the completeness of arithmetic; for Kant it is knowledge of the mind-independent world. In conceiving and exploring this analogy, Debray displays exceptional originality. The paper reads as though Gödel’s results were assigned content for the course, perhaps integrated with lectures and discussions on Kant’s results. But this was not so. The invocation of Gödel as a companion to Kant was entirely Debray’s idea, a fact which makes the clarity and subtlety of his execution all the more impressive.

In attempting an analogy of this sort, there can be temptation to foist square pegs into round holes. Rather than succumb to this, Debray carefully describes the respective differences in motivation, scope, and application between Gödel’s and Kant’s contributions. Also impressive is his discussion of meta-theory in philosophy, science, and mathematics, which grounds his ambitious suggestion that some form of incompleteness is imminent at the deepest reaches of inquiry. Debray closes the essay with a turn that embodies both this contention and a refreshing sense of humor.

—Dan Giberman
Mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers alike describe their respective quests for knowledge as akin to exploring some wild and unknown land, charting and taming the wilderness into new ideas and theories. Typically, there is no end to this imaginary landscape, and discovery can continue indefinitely as old questions are answered and new ones are posed. In mathematics, this scenario was shown to be merely a dream by a result called Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem, a result proven in 1931 that showed every significant formulation of mathematics contains statements that cannot be proven to be true or false. Gödel, the mathematician responsible for the theorem, even provided an example of such a statement whose truth could never be known within any formulation of number theory. Mathematics had been shown to be incomplete, and certain holes in mathematical understanding wouldn’t be filled. In this respect, mathematics began to look like Kant’s transcendental philosophy, in which absolute knowledge of objects is impossible, as it would lead to contradictory proofs and metaphysical inconsistencies. Kant’s incompleteness arose in vastly different contexts and ways; he could not demonstrate it in the rigorous way that Gödel did, and it was applied to metaphysics rather than mathematics. Nonetheless, there are striking analogies between these concepts: each revolutionized its respective field and forced a new understanding of rigorous, logical truth. Each demonstrated that logical reasoning could not answer every question completely. As demonstrated by the similarities between Kant’s and Gödel’s discoveries about the limits of reason, incompleteness is a property common to logical systems of thought.
GÖDEL’S INCOMPLETENESS: THE LIMITS OF MATHEMATICAL LOGIC

In order to understand the implications of Gödel’s result, one should understand its context and why it works. For it is one thing to understand that formal mathematics cannot prove every true statement—yet it is quite another to realize that this was rigorously proven using formal mathematics! Before Gödel, mathematics was viewed as a formal system of axioms from which a set of rules of inference led to true statements called theorems. Sometimes, paradoxes arose, but these were addressed by clarifying the axioms or definitions that led to them. These systems were often used to make statements about numbers, which led to the term number theory being used to describe a system of axioms sufficiently powerful to express mathematical statements. The most significant such axiomatic system was Russell & Whitehead’s *Principia Mathematica*, which was intended to encapsulate all true statements in mathematics, and none of the false ones. It was carefully constructed to avoid the paradoxes that mixed different levels of logic that doomed similar past projects. Gödel’s theorem abruptly inserted itself into this framework, showing not just “that there were irreparable ‘holes’ in the *Principia Mathematica*, but more generally, that no axiomatic system whatsoever could produce all number-theoretical truths, unless it were inconsistent!”¹ This result was not just counterintuitive but also disruptive; it shattered mathematicians’ hopes that some sort of absolute mathematical knowledge was possible.

For such a powerful statement, Gödel’s incompleteness theorem can be proven relatively simply. Gödel first assigns a number to each symbol used in formal number theory: #(0) = 1, #(1) = 2, #(+) = 3, etc. Only a small number of symbols need to be assigned: 0, 1, +, ×, =, ∧, ¬, (, ), ∀, and variables. Other symbols can be built from these, such as ≠ as ¬ =. Then, every meaningful phrase w in number theory can be broken down into symbols <w₁, . . . , wₙ>, and has a Gödel number given by

$$\Gamma^w = \prod_{k=1}^{n} p_k^{#(w_k)}$$

where pₖ is the kth prime number.² (In practice, it is generally unnecessary to compute the actual Gödel number of a statement; it is usually sufficient to know that such a number exists.) Though the specific values chosen for each symbol are somewhat arbitrary (Hofstader uses an entirely different numbering system), Gödel


Thinking Matters
Arun Debray

had found a way to represent statements about number theory as statements within number theory, about which further statements could be made. For example, one can define the shorthand $\text{Prf}(x, y)$ to be the statement that “$x$ is the Gödel number encoding a proof for a theorem with Gödel number $y$.” But since this is a statement about number theory, it has a Gödel number. Thus, it is possible to express that a statement is provable using number theory as a number: it is the Gödel number for the phrase $\exists x : \text{Prf}(x, y)$, or that there is some natural number $x$ that satisfies the relation $\text{Prf}(x, y)$, so that the string encoded as $x$ proves the theorem encoded as $y$. Using the notion of $\text{Prf}$, it is possible for numbers to refer to theorems and for statements within number theory to correspond to statements about number theory.

The statement that Gödel used to prove his theorem is straightforward: it simply claims that it is not a theorem of *Principia Mathematica*. However, none of the techniques described thus far allow a statement to refer to itself. Gödel introduced a quine operator, which takes a formula with at least one free variable and returns the formula with its Gödel number plugged into the free variable. For example, if $x$ is the statement $a \neq 0$ with Gödel number ‘$x$’, then $\text{Quine}(x)$ is the statement (or, equivalently, the Gödel number corresponding to the statement) that ‘$x$ ’$\neq 0$. This happens to be a true statement, but it is easy to make $\text{Quine}(x)$ false, such as when $x$ corresponds to $a = 0$. With quining, self-reference is possible, so Gödel’s statement can be explicitly constructed. First, let $u$ represent the statement $\neg \exists a, b : \text{Prf}(a, b) \land b = \text{Quine}(c)$, or that for a given $c$, there is no number $a$ which forms a proof-pair with $c$. Then, Gödel’s statement $G$ is just $\text{Quine}(u)$, which substitutes ‘$u$’ for $c$. Thus, $G$ is the claim that no $a$ is a proof pair with $\text{Quine}(u)$, or that the formula with Gödel number ‘$\text{Quine}(u)$ ’ is not a theorem of number theory. But that is exactly $G$’s Gödel number! Thus, $G$ claims that it itself is not a theorem. Of course, this means that $G$ cannot be proven within a given formulation of number theory, for if it could, then it would be false, and number theory would be inconsistent. If $G$ is not a theorem, then there is no contradiction, and $G$ is true. $G$ is the undecidable proposition that proves Gödel’s first incompleteness theorem.

A few related theorems follow. Gödel’s second incompleteness theorem demonstrates that a proof of a system’s consistency can only exist if the system is inconsistent. Since all statements can be proven in an inconsistent system, consider the statement $x$ which asserts that $0 \neq 0$. Thus, claiming that number theory is consistent means $\neg \exists a : \text{Prf}(a, x)$ – that no number encodes for a string proving $0 \neq 0$. The formalization
of the proof is much more difficult than that of the first theorem, but as long as the consistency of the system is assumed, this claim to consistency isn’t a theorem.  

More worryingly, Tarski’s theorem demonstrates that there is no formula T (a) that is equivalent to stating that the formula with Gödel number a expresses a truth. If such a formula existed, it could be plugged into a statement which says ∃a : ¬T (a) ∧ b = Quine(a), where b is a free variable. Then, however, Quine(t) asserts that Quine(t) is a false statement, which is absurd: if it were true, it would be false, and vice versa. Thus there is no way to express number-theoretical truth in number theory.  

Unsurprisingly, these theorems had a huge impact on the philosophy of mathematics and logic, refuting mathematicians’ attempts to demonstrate completeness and consistency of any interesting mathematical system. A cornerstone of mathematical thought was that mathematical theorems derived in a logical way were as close as one could get to absolute truth, since they were obtained from reasoning in sensible ways about sensible axioms of numbers. For example, the objective of the *Principia Mathematica* was “to derive all of mathematics from logic, and, to be sure, without contradictions.” Gödel, however, showed that provability in general is weaker than truth, casting doubt on this perspective of mathematics as the inevitable path from logic to truth. Questioning the consistency of number theory also unnerved mathematicians who spent long hours determining whether conjectures were true or not, yet discovered that mathematics might not even be consistent, making many of their results meaningless. Yet various mathematical results have applications in physics and other sciences; do these conclusions about consistency and completeness generalize to the sciences based on mathematical logic synthesized with empirical data? The incompleteness of pure mathematics has little itself to do with philosophical questions about the nature of the world, but mathematical applications suggest the inability to know certain truths about the real world and even to demonstrate that certain properties are unknowable. Quantum mechanics promised exactly this uncertainty at roughly the same time as Gödel, showing that at sufficiently small scales it is impossible to know absolute information about an object and that even observing an object’s properties can change those properties. At some point, mathematicians and scientists alike became frustrated, wondering if there was worth in a field where the ends of knowledge were being reached.

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4 Ibid., 580-81.
5 Ibid., 23.
However, a dissenting line of thought claims Gödel’s incompleteness does not destroy the goal of rigorously demonstrating the consistency of mathematics by claiming that Gödel’s second incompleteness theorem does not adequately generalize to the full notion of consistency. In the first theorem, the incompleteness result does not depend on the specific meaning of the Gödel string G; however, the proof of the second theorem depends on the string that is equivalent to consistency as interpreted by the system. In a sense, a system T “cannot prove its consistency only when there is a sentence both which T ‘recognizes’ as a consistency statement, and which T cannot prove.” Though Gödel’s second theorem is rigorous, it only applies to systems of logic where certain conditions of provability are met. Thus, generalizing a mathematical statement to a philosophical statement is not necessarily valid, and many of the conclusions about consistency overstate the importance of the second incompleteness theorem. From this viewpoint, the more general notion of consistency might yet be demonstrable, though Gödel’s theorems still create issues with strict number theory.

KANT’S INCOMPLETENESS: ANTINOMIES IN METAPHYSICS

Much of what can be said about Gödel and mathematics also applies to Kant and metaphysics. Kant’s goal is to create a new theory of metaphysics, and in order to do this he illustrates several holes in previous theories. Specifically, he creates four antinomies, or pairs of mutually contradictory statements that appear to be equally true. The four antinomies are whether the world has a beginning in time and space or is eternal and infinite; whether matter can be infinitely divided; whether free will exists or nature determines all actions; and whether God is necessary to explain the universe. Each antinomy is formulated as a pair of opposing statements—e.g., the second, written as a thesis that “everything in the world is constituted out of the simple,” and an antithesis that “there is nothing simple, but everything is composite.” Kant considers these statements equally valid and equally provable, so while on first glance these might seem to suggest an analogue to Gödel’s incompleteness, in that a statement cannot be shown to be true or false, they actually are more akin to inconsistency, since Kant finds proofs for both sides of each antinomy.


8 Ibid.
Generally, Kant does quite different things with his concerns with metaphysics than Gödel does with mathematics; instead of using them to arrive at a weaker definition of provability and truth, he uses them to introduce specific solutions and build his new metaphysics. Kant does not lose faith in logical reasoning but rather points out that specific assumptions underlie each antinomy. For example, “the idea of the world, the fact that it is taken to be a mind-independent object, acts as the underlying assumption motivating both parties to the [first two] antinomies.” Kant does not assume that the mind’s perception of the world corresponds accurately to the world in itself and thus can dispose of the antinomies relatively quickly. The boundedness or unboundedness of the universe is merely an idea that has no basis in experience, and so “the magnitude of the world... would therefore have to exist in the world apart from all experience.” As such, by removing the idea that the magnitude of the world exists independent of perception, Kant can resolve the first antinomy. The second antinomy likewise deals with the nature of representations; the division of an object actually only corresponds to the division of its perception in the observer’s mind, so a representation can only be divided as finely as corresponds to one’s experience. Similarly, the third antinomy can be resolved by assigning free will to things in themselves, while appearances are naturally determined. Though it seems counterintuitive that these two properties could coexist, Kant believes that cause and effect are imposed on perceptions by the mind, and that they do not correspond to objective reality. Thus, determinism is a product of the mind as well, since it is based on causality. The final antinomy is also related to cause and effect: given that causality is a product of the mind, it is equally valid to say that there is no necessary cause for all objects or that there is a God who causes. In this way, Kant’s antinomies lead to his revolution in metaphysics, where he asserts that perceptions can never be completely accurate depictions of actual objects and supports this claim by demonstrating that it resolves the antinomies.

However, Kant is merely trading one form of incompleteness for another; though he resolves the antinomies, he does so in a way that prevents absolute knowledge of the world. Kant’s metaphysics are consistent, as he has addressed their contradictions, but incomplete, since they cannot prove true statements about objects but only their physical representations. Alternatively, one could define knowledge as corresponding

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10 Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, 77.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
to representations rather than actual objects, but this sacrifices absolute truth for completeness. Both formulations create a very Gödelian concept of knowledge as inevitably weaker than absolute truth, though one limits knowledge and the other removes truth from the equation. Though Kant begins from a very different set of ideas than Gödel, he concludes very similarly that knowledge or provability cannot be complete and that there must exist some unprovable truths. However, Kant’s work is in metaphysics, not mathematics, and so the consequences differ somewhat. Arguably, the former encompasses the latter, and so Kant anticipated Gödel, but it is clear from the major differences in Kant’s and Gödel’s methodologies of proof that Kant could not have guessed at the incompleteness of mathematics due to self-reference. Rather, Kant’s incompleteness corresponds more to the sensible world and the nature of true statements about material objects.

Thus, while the notion of truth in the real world was only a tangential question for Gödelian incompleteness, it is central to Kant. Though the idea that observations and reality were distinct is as old as Plato, Kant was the first to formulate the distinction in terms of a filter through one’s perceptions of objects. Cause and effect, for example, are useful for humans and thus are built into human perception although they don’t necessarily have meaning outside of it. Would all rational beings observe cause and effect on the world, or do others use different lenses to see the world? True logical reasoning depends on statements of the form “A implies B,” suggesting that reason is closely linked with cause and effect and that any creature that cannot connect cause and effect must use a fundamentally different epistemology. However, that cause and effect so heavily influence reason creates another link between Kant and Gödel, though this time it is negative: under Kantian metaphysics, cause and effect have no correlation to reality, and so neither does logic. Thus, Gödel’s reasoning does not correspond to the real world, even though it predicts similar things to Kant’s!

FILLING IN THE HOLES

Another very important difference between Gödel’s mathematical incompleteness and Kant’s metaphysical incompleteness is how each deals with the inevitable gaps in knowledge that incompleteness creates. Mathematical incompleteness is a factor in relatively few theorems, so each can be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. For example, Euclid’s parallel postulate, one of his five axioms of geometry, states that if two lines intersect a third at angles that sum to less than 90°, then they must intersect. This is a perfectly reasonable statement in ordinary geometry, but it was eventually shown to be independent of the other four more fundamental axioms.
Thus, different interpretations of it are equally valid, such as claiming that one line could have multiple parallel lines that intersect at only one point or that a line could have no parallels through a given point. Thus, geometry split in three, with the new branches known as hyperbolic and elliptical geometry, respectively.\textsuperscript{13} Each of these interpretations is valid, and they have many things in common and various uses in the other branches of mathematics and physics.

Every undecidable statement in mathematics can cause a similar bifurcation, including Gödel’s statement $G$. If one considers it to be true, number theory goes on much as before. However, it is equally valid, and considerably more interesting, to add $\neg G$ as an axiom. Since $G$ was shown to be true, this appears nonsensical, but all that is required is a generalization of the natural numbers. Specifically, it is an axiom that some number forms a proof-pair with Quine($u$). However, it was also shown that 0 is not that number, nor is 1, nor 2, etc. Thus, these generalized natural numbers do not fit anywhere on the number line and are “best visualized as [. . .] infinitely large integers.”\textsuperscript{14} Conventional properties of numbers, such as commutativity, still hold, but asking the size of a generalized natural number is a meaningless question, for assigning a size would place it among the naturals, which do not form proof-pairs with Quine($u$). Interestingly, these generalized naturals display a property similar to Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle: there are various ways to index them as ordered triples of integers, so one might look like $(1, -5, 7)$ in one system but $(2, 2, 3)$ in another. In some schemes, it is simple to calculate the sum of two indexed numbers, and in others it is easy to compute their product. But no single scheme allows one to know both the sum and the product.\textsuperscript{15} This is yet another manifestation of incompleteness, in a manner and place it was never expected from $\neg G$. Bifurcation around undecidable propositions leads to further mathematical discoveries and interesting results, despite the question of incompleteness.

Kant, however, does not use bifurcation, since his incompleteness is common and different for every observer. It would be far too complicated to track all such possibilities, so instead Kant considers each observer a self-contained system. No observer can know everything accurately, and the observations of different beings will disagree, but each observer’s perception of reality is consistent, though not complete. The questions raised by the antinomies will never be answered,


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 454.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 455.
though a rational mind can understand Kant’s explanation for why this is the case. In general, Kant believes philosophical questions are answered by moving to a new frame where they are meaningless, which is precisely how he resolved his antinomies, but this means the original questions cannot be answered. The difference between Kant’s solutions to incompleteness and Gödel’s are indicative of the differences in set-theoretical mathematics and metaphysics as a whole: Gödel found it is generally easy to define truth and provability given axioms and modes of reasoning. Only a few statements caused him the most trouble. However, Kant could not know that anything observed about reality is necessarily absolutely true. Thus, it is possible for mathematicians to work around these holes, paying attention to which axioms are assumed so as to not fall into them, while philosophers have to divide truth into many more sections corresponding to each observer. These two vastly different consequences of incompleteness are a surprising development given that somewhat similar logic underlies both systems, amplifying the differences in philosophical and mathematical modes of thinking. Mathematical logic is necessarily more rigorous, though still not complete, and thus its limits are relatively well known relative to the philosophical reasoning that depends on incompleteness in reality.

Why, though, does this Kantian metaphysics apply to all philosophy? Kant was not the only philosopher to offer theories behind causality and the relation of the sensible and the real world. However, Kant, like Gödel, was dealing with the theory of theories. Gödel’s meta-mathematics allowed him to make incompleteness not just a property of one axiomatic system but of mathematical logic itself, granting it its enormous significance. Similarly, Kant’s meta-metaphysics dealt with antinomies that had dogged many different and competing theories of metaphysics and enabled him to establish metaphysical ideas that applied to not just one theory but to the general concept of philosophical thinking. Thus, given that incompleteness is a crucial part of Kant’s transcendental ideal, it clearly plays a fundamental role in philosophical logic as well as metaphysical logic. Although other meta-theories of philosophy do exist and offer competition to Kant, they fit into Kantian incompleteness as well. Those theories that allow for or predict incompleteness agree with and reinforce the idea that absolute truth cannot be reached, and those that don’t stumble over Gödel’s results and modern physics that formulaically limits what can be empirically observed and what can be known. Synthesizing Kantian incompleteness with Gödelian incompleteness, despite their different origins, illuminates the differences between mathematical and philosophical logic, from
which very different ideas produce very similar results that have very different consequences. And if incompleteness can occur in these two so logical fields, it must be present elsewhere, too, as logic in science and everyday life flows from that of mathematics and metaphysics.

CONCLUSION

Though Kant and Gödel established principles of incompleteness in very different ways within the fields of mathematics and metaphysics, respectively, their ideas share many basic principles which suggest that incompleteness is an inevitable consequence of human thought and logic. Physics, for example, underwent a change from primarily deterministic theories in the mid-nineteenth century to relativistic and quantum concepts that limited the amount of knowledge an observer could have about a sufficiently small experiment. Once again, incompleteness pops up at a certain point in the human logical thought process, though it does so in a different form. The consequences, too, are quite different; quantum mechanics can be experimentally tested and could someday produce applied products such as dizzyingly powerful quantum computers. From this perspective it is not as necessary to work around incompleteness in the sciences as it is to embrace it and use it like any other technique or tool. The world is unexpectedly much more interesting in its incompleteness, as it leads to technologies that would not have been possible in classical mechanics and ideas that challenge the greatest thinkers.

Yet Gödel's theorems have no such applications, immediate or otherwise; set theory is an abstraction of an abstraction of an abstraction, useful primarily for reinforcing the foundations of mathematics. Kantian metaphysics is similar; one's perception of reality, though incomplete, is consistent, and thus an entire life can be lived from within one's mind, completely uncaring whether it corresponds to reality. Yet these results are important to more than just mathematicians and philosophers, for the notions of truth and knowledge of truth apply to everyday life. Knowing that logical reasoning cannot lead to all truths is important in understanding the basis of science, and understanding how different observers perceive different realities as per Kant or quantum physics allows one to challenge the conventional perception of things and ideas, and thus to learn more about them. But the most important aspect of incompleteness is the weakening of truth to something less attached to logic and reason; knowing the reasoning behind this could reshape an entire worldview in a way that does affect one's interactions with other observers. That incompleteness is present in all manner of logical thought leads to a rethinking of logic itself, and
logic does pervade everyday life. While logic is still valid for most statements if one is careful, knowing its limitations can be a valuable and applied result of this abstract notion of incompleteness. Without incompleteness, one's conception of reason itself would be incomplete, and so

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Ikshu’s paper is about two episodes in the ten-part 1989 Dekalog (Decalogue) television series by the Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski (1941-1996). Each episode in the series is named after one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:4-21). Decalogue I considers the prohibition against idolatry (“you shall have no other Gods before me”), while Decalogue 5 centers around the prohibition against murder. Ikshu analyzes how Kieślowski reinterprets these two commandments in particular and, in turn, how the director constructs the meaning of the biblical Decalogue more broadly. For the final assignment of the course, we had asked students to choose a work of art that “retells” one of the biblical stories studied in "Ultimate Meanings: Decoding Religious Stories from around the World" and to analyze its way of reinterpreting the Bible.

Deciding to work on the Decalogue by Kieślowski, who is best known in the West for his Three Colors Trilogy (Blue, White, and Red, 1994-1995), was a brave choice to begin with, as the director’s oeuvre is not easy. Ikshu handled the challenge admirably. His paper is exquisitely crafted and reflects the sophistication as a reader of texts and films that he displayed over two quarters of section discussion. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of Ikshu’s analysis is his analysis of the aesthetic choices in Kieślowski’s films. Examining the “gaze” of the camera lens and of persons in the film, Ikshu argues that the Decalogue deliberately estranges viewers from characters, compelling us to “ask whether the relationship between God and the world is similar to that of the viewer and film.” In so doing, Ikshu applies ideas and interpretive techniques mastered in study of other course materials (from readings of Genesis to stories by Jorge Luis Borges) to a difficult medium and work of his own choosing.

— Amos Bitzan
I

n his Decalogue series, Krzysztof Kieślowski offers much more than an updated allegory about the Ten Commandments. Each episode is more reinterpretation than it is re-imagination, wherein the director presents the Commandments as an interconnected system of questions worth asking rather than as a list of uncontestable maxims. Decalogue I takes the first commandment (according to the Roman Catholic order), “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other Gods before me,” as its central theme. The film focuses on a father who places complete faith in reason and his computer. His precocious son Pawel bubbles with curiosity about both the scientific world of his father and the religious perspective of his aunt Irena. The father, Krzysztof, has his worldview shattered when his computer calculates that the frozen lake is safe for skating but a freak accident causes the ice to break, resulting in the death of his son. Decalogue V works with the deceptively concise Commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Jacek is a young man wandering around Warsaw with no particular aim other than playing cruel jokes on strangers. He eventually gets a ride from an equally dislikeable taxi driver, whom Jacek brutally murders. A year later, Jacek’s lawyer Piotr is unable to protect his client from the death penalty. The horrific rendering of the following execution scene demonstrates Kieślowski’s opposition to the death penalty. Although these two episodes ostensibly deal with different Commandments, they both force the viewer to confront similar questions about the possibility of faith in a cruel world.

This vein of theological inquiry naturally brings about a degree of existential angst in Kieślowski’s characters. Indeed, the director’s art is richest when it dissects the
psychological and emotional relationship of the individual with the Commandments. The centrality of the characters in Decalogue I and V brings to fore the main issue of the films: How can people so profoundly alienated from God find meaning in the Commandments? It is this alienation that provides the thematic unity for the series. The director’s treatment of the subject of alienation revolves around the difficulty of belief in a world seemingly governed by unforgiving chance. His portrait of the desolate landscape of late-1980s Warsaw seems like the least likely of places to find God, and his protagonists struggle in this very search. In reference to this dreary vision, film critic Annette Insdorf writes, “These compositions relate to the overriding visual strategy...which stresses alienation” (92). It is this alienation that occupies the heart of Kieślowski’s drama. The cinematic motifs and techniques used in the films reinforce this “distance” between the characters, God, and even the viewer in an environment devoid of divine presence and design.

The role of alienation in the films is two-fold: there is the estrangement of the protagonist from God as well as the distancing of the viewer from the characters. The first of these arises from a consideration of the intra-diegetic gaze, while the second is a manifestation of the spectator’s or camera’s gaze. In Decalogue I, the opening sequence includes a shot of Pawel running happily on the TV screen (Kieślowski 1’45”). At the end of the film, after the boy’s death, the sequence is repeated, presumably as the aunt watches (51’8”). The second time, the footage bears much more weight. The gaze of the characters upon this TV footage demonstrates their insurmountable separation from the dead child. The screen has an eerie blue tinge, evoking the blueness of the ice under which the boy died. Insdorf explains this connection: “The first shot—a frozen lake—can be likened to the TV screen in the second scene: we don’t know what lies under the surface. But by the end, the lake has been shown to contain death by keeping the child within its melted water; the television is no longer a simple screen but maintains the child “alive” within it” (72-73). This interpretation highlights the importance of separation in the gaze since the father and aunt must look upon the boy through a screen, whether it is the TV or a layer of ice. This scene also recalls a conversation between Krzysztof and Pawel on the nature of death in which Krzysztof tells his son that the soul does not exist and that a memory is all that is left after one dies (Kieślowski 8’6”). Pawel finds a very different answer from his aunt, who speaks from the Catholic view on life after death (19’13”). The second shot of the TV screen is symbolic not only of a memory of the boy but also of the memory of the viewer who has seen this same shot at the start of the film. Taken as a whole, these two scenes force one to ask if it is merely a memory that has been captured or if there is a soul that lurks behind...
Thinking Matters

Ikshu Neithalath

this memory. The remoteness of the character’s gaze draws attention to the difficulty each experiences in finding the spiritual side of the tragedy.

Perhaps the most mysterious representation of the distant God is the unnamed “witness” character that appears in all of the films. In both films, actor Artur Barciś briefly appears as an unnamed witness to the events of the story. He never speaks and certainly never works to impact the course of events. Lacking agency, context, and dialogue, he is a character stripped down to only the gaze. In the first episode, he is a homeless man sitting at a fire beside the frozen lake (Kieślowski 1’9”). From this vantage point, he watches as Krzysztof tests the ice and presumably looks on as the boy drowns. In V, the same character stands by the side of the road and shakes his head at Jacek, as if to warn him against his premeditated murder (20’0”). Toward the ends of film, immediately after the lawyer Piotr has been congratulated on the birth of his child, the mysterious onlooker appears again, this time holding a ladder in a painter’s uniform (Kieślowski 39’49”). In the interest of unifying such seemingly disconnected placements of the same actor, several critics have advanced the view that he is a supernatural being. According to author Marek Haltof, Kieślowski and the cinematographer, Wieslaw Zdort, initially labeled the character as “the Angel of Fate” (81). A counter-interpretation instead claims, “his [the witness’] presence is like that attributed to God in Job: ‘Should he come near me, I see him not; should he pass by, I am not aware of him’ (J 9,11)” (Garbowski 102). In both readings, the witness serves as a possible link between the grim realism of the characters’ lives and God. The second interpretation also pays special attention to the fact that the watcher is largely defined by his inability to intervene in reality, thereby reinforcing the theme of God’s remoteness from the world.

Just as the gaze of the characters upon each other is important for understanding the role of God in the two movies, the gaze of the viewer on the characters is characterized by a similar alienating effect. While the distancing of the audience from the characters here is quite different from the “Verfremdungseffekt” of Bertolt Brecht, Kieślowski’s use of the camera to manipulate the fourth wall has similar consequences in the films. As Haltof observes, in V, “the television version introduces the main characters in the manner characteristic of several of Kieślowski’s films—through their reflections in mirrors or glass” (90). We first see Piotr’s face in a mirror, and we only recognize that the shot is not directly of his face once the camera has zoomed out sufficiently (Kieślowski 0’57”). Similarly, the cab driver is first seen through the panel of a door that also reflects the gray housing complex outside (1’25”). Jacek is shown in a mirror behind metal bars, foreshadowing his
later imprisonment (2’23”). The motifs of indirect vision and the lens are repeated throughout the film. Several shots utilize internal framing to present the subject through an extra lens beyond that of the camera. In one scene, Jacek looks through a small opening made by his bent arm (7’28”). Also, when he drags the taxi driver’s body to the water, the camera remains inside the door, causing the car door to act as a secondary lens (26’02”). In the hanging, we are offered one of the film’s most haunting shots when our vantage point is placed beneath the trap door, looking up to Jacek’s limp, dangling feet (54’0”). By adding a “secondary lens” between the viewer and the subject in each of these scenes, Kieślowski creates the illusion of distance. One theory holds that “glass is used to distance the audience, to help it retain its objectivity, to aid it to observe and judge” (Maurer 52). Since the film completely leaves out Jacek’s trial, one can see the entire episode as a type of trial in which the audience plays judge and capital punishment itself is put on trial. In this case, the cinematic distancing of the audience allows the viewer to assume the role of dispassionate arbiter. However, comparison to I suggests a different reading. In I, Pawel watches his father give a lecture at the university. Pawel crouches by a slide projector, closing one eye so that he can look through a small hole at Krzysztof (Kieślowski 25’8”). As the father lectures, the son’s gaze drifts, at times looking at the father’s face but at other times focusing only on his hands. Since Pawel, and by extension, the audience, looks through a secondary lens, one can never see all of Krzysztof’s body at once. This visual constriction of the secondary lens adds to the “thickness” of the fourth wall. The parallel between the alienation of God from the characters and the distancing of audience and character indicates a natural connection between the deity and the viewer. The films force one to ask whether the relationship between God and the world is similar to that of the viewer and the film.

Despite its meta-cinematic formulation, this question has implications beyond just the medium of film. The first theological concern to which it gives rise is the problem of belief. Indeed, if God is nothing more than an observer, then what becomes of faith? In Decalogue I and V, Kieślowski tells the stories of men who have had their faith shattered. In I, Krzysztof initially has total faith in his computer, but this is shaken if not destroyed after it fails to predict the thaw that kills his son. His mourning is marked by an onslaught of religious iconography and iconoclasm. In the church, he topples a makeshift altar, thereby causing hot wax to drip as teardrops on a painting of the Virgin Mary. When he reaches for the holy water, he pulls out a frozen wafer of the liquid (Kieślowski 51’50”). Just as Mary’s tears mark the death of Jesus, the frozen holy water can represent a type of spiritual death.
symbols point either to the death of God or to the death of Krzysztof’s personal God of reason. If we accept the first interpretation, then we are left with the problem of resolving why the ice actually broke. Although Kieślowski offers no answer to this question, the fact that the witness character sits by the frozen lake opens the possibility that God’s hand was responsible for the breaking of the ice. Thus, it seems as if the second reading, that something inside of the father has died, is the more defensible of the two. Again, we find that despite their theological aspirations, the films are firmly planted in the realm of the personal rather than the metaphysical. The turn away from God is also brought out in one of the central motifs of the entire Decalogue series – milk. In I, Pawel complains that the milk is sour, and he later lets the milk freeze and crack its bottle (9’20” and 28’2”). Certainly, the characters do not live in the “land of milk and honey.” Considering the religious connotation of milk, the souring of the milk is a souring of God’s promise.

The fifth installment also includes a story of lost faith. Piotr is first depicted as an idealistic law student passing his exam by giving a speech on how “the law should not imitate nature, the law should improve nature” (Kieślowski 0’3”). By the end of the film, he has borne witness to both the horror of nature and the horror of the law. After the execution, he sits in his car by a forest and a meadow, perhaps the same meadow where Jacek’s sister was killed, and screams “I abhor it!” (55’04”). This destruction of faith is a loss of faith in himself and in his profession. After the trial, he asks the judge if an older, more experienced lawyer could have made a difference, to which the judge replies with a no (32’07”). The inevitably of the situation reflects a vacuum of hope and therefore a lack of the godly. Jacek’s drifting through Warsaw bears a similar, hopeless quality. In the early scene of Jacek at the movie theater, we find, “[t]he murderer-to-be is a young man in a state of constant expectation, and these expectations are usually unfulfilled—also for the film which he was to watch that afternoon, but which the cashier advised him against seeing,” as the critic Christopher Garbowskii describes (93). Jacek’s wandering is rife with such instances of unfulfilled expectations. For Jacek, these expectations take the place of hope. The let-downs he experiences are each small crises of faith. In light of this, his completely unmotivated murder can be understood as a final act of agency – for once, he is able get the result he expects. Jacek thereby becomes a perverse reflection of the tragic hero. Lacking faith in a world that seems to reject the very notion of faith itself, he turns to murder. Hence, the murderer and the man who defends him lose not only the case but also the last vestiges of their faith.
The question of faith is closely related to another problem—the role of fate as against chance. In their existential wrestling with their isolation from God, Kieślowski’s characters find another problem in their world: their universe is seemingly governed by cruel chance. No matter where they turn, they can find none of the grand design that a world touched by God should inherit. At the beginning of I, Krzysztof believes that the world obeys a natural, rational order decipherable by his computer. The breaking of the ice occurs against all odds, thereby demonstrating the inadequacy of reason to fully know the world. Thus we have another answer to the question of why the ice broke; in addition to the explanation of divine intervention, there is also the possibility that it was completely random. The role of chance in Pawel’s death becomes evident in the moments leading up to the father’s realization of his son’s death. From the minute when Kryzstof realizes something might be wrong up to the point when he watches the firemen pull his son out of the ice, he is beset by signs of the arbitrary nature of the world. The first such symbol is the breaking of his bottle of ink, in which “a cracking ink bottle intimates disaster, the ink’s spread picturing the uncontrollable, and the water below the ice” (Coates 95). The salient part of this parallel between the image of the ink bottle and the breaking ice is that both events signify unexpected disorder (Kieślowski 34’14”). After the bottle breaks, Krzysztof finds his life governed by coincidence and malignant improbability. For instance, he finds that Pawel’s English lesson was cancelled because his teacher suddenly fell ill. As Krzysztof runs about to try to find Pawel, he is surrounded by images of his trapped position. Doors close in his face and the grille over the stairwell window frames him in the bars of a jail cell (37’45,” 38’46,” 45’7”). Ultimately, the father’s loss of faith in reason stems from the apparent randomness of his son’s death. If Job curses his just God for permitting injustice, then Krzysztof rails against his rational God for allowing the unreasonable.

The characters in V feel a similarly overbearing presence of chance in their lives. The taxi driver is shown rejecting several other customers before picking up Jacek. Had he decided to pick up just one of those people, his fate would have been radically altered. Similarly, Jacek’s wandering is governed by the laws of the random. In one scene, he pushes a rock off a bridge onto the traffic below (Kieślowski 8’07”). He walks away, leaving it up to chance if the rock hits a car. Even Jacek’s act of murder, which defines his character, is random violence. When he speaks to Piotr before the execution, he reveals a shaping moment of his childhood when his sister was run over by a tractor. Jacek wonders if things would have turned out differently had his sister not been killed (45’57”). Jacek was transformed by the unpredictable, random
death of his sister. When we first meet him on the streets of Warsaw, he has already accepted the supremacy of fortuity and lives without regard for the possibility of divine design. Jacek’s speculation on what his life could have been had his sister not died parallels another such speculation in the film. Piotr recalls that he was in the same café as Jacek on the day the murder took place. Piotr also wonders if he could have done something to change the course of events (33’31”). For Piotr, this incredible coincidence is a manifestation of the possibility of meaningful action to effect change. Yet by the end of the movie, Piotr has been forced to recognize his powerlessness in the face of a larger system. With this discovery, the coincidence of the café is reduced to mere happenstance, lacking any greater meaning or hope of possibility.

The Ten Commandments are perhaps some of the greatest “answers” in human history; they form a definite answer to the question of how one must live one’s life. It is a bit surprising, then, that a series of films based around the Commandments works so hard to avoid answers altogether. While the director carefully sets the stage for his characters to play out their crises, he offers little in the way of a theological resolution. Krzysztof and Piotr are both left as broken men in a seemingly hostile world, without even their old gods of reason or law to turn to. The psychological drama of their alienation from God is clear, but how they are meant to deal with it is not. Through his control of the cinematic dimension of the films, Kieślowski is able to direct not only the gaze of his characters but also the gaze of his audience. Yet after this gaze has passed over the wintery Polish cityscape and the fragile lives therein, we are left staring into the void. This emptiness is the director’s final image. It serves as a reminder that the films do not constitute a theological framework or biblical exegesis but are simply stories of individuals who have lost both themselves and their gods. Through this intensely personal reading of the Commandments, Kieślowski breathes new life into a text once set in stone.
WORKS CITED


INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

As part of the Creating Lives project developed by Professor Edith Sheffer (Department of History), students in “Everyday Life: How History Happens” were asked to write from the perspective of an “ordinary” person who experiences the momentous and often catastrophic transformations of Europe in the twentieth century. In the form of diary entries, responses to specific questions, and memoir chapters, students explored events ranging from the outbreak of the First World War to the fall of the Iron Curtain through the lens of everyday life. Beatrice’s character, Lev Turovsky, is an Odessan Jew who ends up becoming a Soviet film director and then running into trouble with official censorship. Her vignettes from Lev’s life are brilliantly constructed, combining historical research with scintillating writing. Using the twentieth-century history she has studied in the course, Beatrice adeptly links her character’s experiences and perceptions to larger historical changes transforming his society, documenting them in footnotes to lectures and course readings.

—Amos Bitzan
My father wanted a son to inherit his success. After many years and five daughters, I—Lev Iakovych Turovsky—came into the world, a little late, but exuberantly welcomed. Though I live in Odessa, I was raised on Yevreyskaya, street of the Jews. There, my father owns and operates his apothecary shop.

My education has been close to home since the year I turned nine. That October, we hid in our cellar for a long time, listening to glass shatter on the streets. I remember nothing else of that notorious pogrom, but I no longer let down my guard in the city.

Many poets and free thinkers are guests in our home. My father tears through the great Russian novels; despite having a head for numbers, he never discouraged my head for art. Instead, he declared I must be properly trained in the principles of business.

The beautiful gates of Odessa University, which I have often passed, are closed to Jews. So I struggle through economics at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität instead. The winter freezes me. The German catches in my throat. The only decent thing about Berlin is the theater, though it’s best my father not hear I said so.

Analysis
My great-grandparents were survivors of the 1905 Odessa pogrom. By developing a character with a background similar to that of my ancestors, I can explore my own
heritage. The history of film intrigues me. Though there were few filmmakers in 1914, Lev will be in the right time and place to become involved in the growing industry.

MARCH 1914: THE SUBTLE ART OF FREUD

A young foreigner came to me for a persistent cough unresponsive to medicine.¹ He consulted me at the urging of one of my former clients but confessed he had agreed to our appointment only out of curiosity. He insisted that his cough was a reaction to the German winter. When asked about his condition since his move from warmer climes, he admitted that despondency and fatigue appeared concurrently with the cough.² His persistent claims that the illness was physical showed strong signs of repression.³

After some reluctance, the patient admitted that he was “not very fond of Berlin” and that he was attending university at his father’s insistence. The father is a modestly successful shop owner and a distant object of the patient’s admiration. The mother is the source of more personal affection. He was clearly closer to the latter, due to the typical sexual attraction between mother and son.⁴ His preoccupation with becoming a competent heir was an expression of his desire to take his father’s place.⁵

The separation from his family, who still live abroad, coincided with the onset. He had convinced himself that external causes, such as climate, had triggered a physical illness. But this conscious thought masked a repressed one: the patient’s Oedipal love for his mother and his consequent distress in her absence. At our session’s conclusion, the patient declared that it had been “most interesting.” He has not returned.

Analysis

Lev’s time at university has only confirmed his suspicion that he despises business. He knows his passion is for the arts, but he is terrified of disobeying—and, moreover, disappointing—his father and his family.

¹ Sigmund Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 17. Freud lists “tussis nervosa” as “the commonest of all somatic and mental symptoms.”
² Ibid., 16. Freud identifies these symptoms of depression as part of Dora’s hysteria.
³ Ibid., 51. Freud considers “a most emphatic negative” an indication of a repressed thought.
⁴ Ibid., 14. Freud claims parents and children of opposite genders tend to identify with each other because of sexual attraction.
⁵ Ibid., 48. Freud writes that Dora, in love with her father, is unconsciously “putting herself in her mother’s place.”
Lev’s relationship with his father is shaped by his family’s socioeconomic position. The Turovskys’ place in a relatively new, urban middle class is dependent on their business’s continuing success. An only son would be traditionally responsible for the inheritance of his father’s shop and the maintenance of his family’s position. The conflict between Lev’s obligation to his family and his desire to explore the arts are the source of his depression. According to Freud, however, such “hysteria” was only caused by a disturbance in the sexual sphere, so the analyst explains Lev’s relationship with his parents through the Freudian theory of Oedipal love.

JUNE 28, 1914: UNLIKELY COMRADES

I arrived at my cabin on the train to Odessa, eager to leave university behind. Who did I find but Marko Fedirovych, Odessan gentile, fellow student of business. He had already taken the top bunk.

“Lev Iakovych,” he cried. “What luck! In these second-class cars, you never know if you’ll be paired with a thief.”

“What luck indeed,” I said, with little spirit.

Odessa now seemed very far away. As I stowed my effects, I felt his eyes on my back.

“There’s no need for that,” he said.

“Pardon?”

“You’ve always acted coldly toward me. I don’t mind that you’re a Jew; you shouldn’t mind that I’m a Christian.” I glanced back sharply. Marko shrugged. “We’re all in this together.”

“And what, exactly, are we in?”

He lowered his voice. “You’re not much of a Czarist.”

“Jews have no cause for patriotism.” But you, you’re Russian.”

6 Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj, *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1990), 422. While much of the prerevolutionary Ukrainian national movement was still strongly antisemitic, the socialist and democratic factions supported a “fraternal attitude toward all peoples,” including Ukrainian Jews.

7 Edith Sheffer, “1914: Modern Worlds, Modern Self” (Lecture, Stanford University, September 27, 2012). Professor Sheffer discussed the institutionalized antisemitism of the Russian Empire.
“By no means—I’m Ukrainian. The yoke of the Empire strangles us both.”

Divisions between Russians had always seemed petty. They spoke the same, acted the same, and hated us equally. But I knew treason when I heard it.

“You shouldn’t talk so carelessly.”

“Lev Iakovych, your politics are a well-known fact. If you didn’t want to be thought a leftist, you shouldn’t have debated economics with Professor Brandt in front of the class.”

Marko hopped down from his bunk and sat on my bed. I sighed and joined him.

“You don’t know the half of what the Empire has done.”

“I know we deserve independence.”

“It’s not just that. The Czar’s soldiers have beaten, butchered—”

“Jews?”

I nodded.

“Have you seen…?”

I nodded again.

**Analysis**

Lev is an imperial subject, but he has grown up isolated from non-Jewish Odessa, leaving him unfamiliar with Ukrainian national identity. Still, the pogrom that shaped his worldview began after the 1905 Revolution with Czarist mobs, who were responding to the threat that Jews allegedly posed to the Russian Empire.

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8 Edith Sheffer, “Imperialism at Home and Abroad” (Lecture, Stanford University, October 11, 2012). The Russian Empire stretched from Eastern Europe to Asia, encompassing many peoples who were not ethnically, culturally, or linguistically Russian.

9 Jaroslav Hasek, *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), 12-13. Hasek shows how carefully civilians had to speak of their conquerors in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Though a satirical exaggeration, Hasek’s story is a reminder that imperial subjects had no freedom of speech.

10 Sheffer, “Imperialism at Home and Abroad” Professor Sheffer stated that all empires were maintained through violence. The 1905 Odessa pogrom was a counterrevolutionary riot as well as an anti-Semitic one—Jews were perceived as socialists and a threat to the Russian Empire.
NOVEMBER 3, 1914: VIGILANCE IS KEY
The Odessan summer seems distant now. As nations mobilized around us, my parents had argued in whispers—it would be suicide to wait for the Russian draft, but no one knew what the Germans would do to me.

I arrived in Berlin on August 1—the day the Kaiser declared war on the Czar. I had barely unpacked when I was summoned by the dean. A policeman stood beside him. When I begged for my life, they both laughed.

“Just some questions,” said Officer Fassbinder.

Fassbinder soon decided that I would make a terrible spy. Still, I must go to the station for a monthly interrogation.

“Ah,” he greets me, smirking. “My favorite kike.”

NOVEMBER 30, 1916: ORDINARY TORTURES
I would rather fight than endure this hell. Everything is rationed, including fuel. I am half-frozen and half-starved; the mere mention of turnips makes my stomach churn. But I can complain to no one. The German classmates I used to laugh with fall silent as I pass, and when I speak with Marko Fedirovych, they accuse us of conspiracy. Even Fassbinder is gone—beaten dead by strikers.

11 Amos Bitzan, “Minorities, Empires, and Nation-States in World War I” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, October 18, 2012). According to Dr. Bitzan, 600,000 Jews were drafted into the Russian Army. Because of widespread antisemitism in the Russian military, military service would be especially dangerous for Jewish soldiers.

12 Edith Sheffer, “The World in 1914” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, September 27, 2012). Professor Sheffer discussed the increasing frequency and severity of pogroms in the Russian Empire. Many pogroms were condoned or instigated by government forces, so a Russian Jew would not be unreasonable to fear violence from the police.

13 Bitzan, “Minorities, Empires, and Nation-States in World War I” Dr. Bitzan emphasized the paranoia and suspicion rampant during wartime. Any Russian citizen in Germany would certainly be monitored.

14 Ernst Jünger, Storm of Steel (New York: Penguin, 2004). Jünger’s recollections reflect a common mindset of the time—that being a soldier would offer a chance for heroism. Many civilians saw military service as an escape from the tedium, fear, and hardship they were forced to endure, without realizing that most soldiers “had become thoroughly disillusioned.”

15 Edith Sheffer, “World War I” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, October 16, 2012). As a result of the British blockade, there were severe shortages in wartime Germany. Food and other necessities were rationed. The aptly named “Turnip Winter” of 1916-17 seriously affected morale.

16 Sheffer, “World War I” Because of starvation and other wartime hardships, industrial strikes
Every morning, I scour the German papers. Odessa is seldom mentioned, but I find reports of what the Russians have done to conquered Jews. I try to envision my family, safe and united, with plenty of new nieces and nephews. But as the War drags on, the image slips away. Every night, I dream the same dream: the postman delivers two years’ worth of letters from home.

NOVEMBER 1, 1918: LIFE GOES ON

I expected to be overjoyed if the revolution ever came. But sorting through garbled reports of the Czar’s abdication, I felt only disbelief. The evening the news arrived, Marko Fedirovyč appeared on my doorstep.

“Well,” I said.

“Finally,” said Marko.

In his bag, he had a bottle of bootleg schnapps.

After that night, life sped up again. The Bolsheviks took command. Trotsky signed the armistice. I received a business diploma I have decided never to use and started working as a stagehand. I can’t return just yet, but I finally received mail from Odessa.

It was a box packed with four years of letters from home.

Analysis

Lev, as a Russian Jew, fears persecution at the hands of both Germans and Russians.

and riots became increasingly common in Germany.

17 S. Ansky, The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 6. Reports of horrifying violence were taken advantage of by the German propaganda machine: “…it was easy to believe the German newspapers, when they wrote that the Cossacks hacked off people’s arms and legs and buried victims alive.”

18 Ansky, 8. During wartime, people relied on rumors and propaganda for news, because “all other channels of information were blocked.” Correspondence between civilians in enemy nations was probably impossible due to censorship.

19 Sheffer, “World War I” Professor Sheffer claimed that information was replaced by unreliable propaganda during World War I.

20 Sheffer, “World War I” As a result of the blockade and subsequent rationing, the German black market boomed.

21 Sheffer, “World War I” Railway lines were important to the war effort, so their use by civilians was restricted.
With no allegiance to Germany or the antisemitic Czar, he perceives the war as just another hardship to survive. As a socialist, Lev opposes the war. But because he sees himself as a powerless victim, he joins the civilian populations whose passivity allowed it to happen. By 1916, Lev is ostracized by nationalistic hatred, though he suffers the same as German civilians. Lev’s naïve wish to be a soldier is not just because of the drudgery of wartime life—he wants to know, or be told, which side he is on.

Misery suffered during wartime caused many to become disenchanted. At the war’s end, Lev decides not to continue with business. He no longer sees the point of earning wealth and status when the world could strip them so quickly away.

NOVEMBER 15, 1922: THE MAD CITY

One day, I live in fear—terrified by the barricades, the guns, and the shadow of some radical new putsch. Other times, surrounded by artists, I can hardly believe that Berlin is a war zone. My colleagues inform me of the German Communists’ marginal victories, but I spend my days in Ufa’s studios, splattered with paint, paying politics little heed. Even the Germans can’t seem to understand them. As a foreigner, I don’t pretend to try. Anyways, there are more entertaining pursuits in Berlin. I spend more money than I make—on concerts, exhibitions, the cinema. During my university years, I lived like a hermit, but these days I’ve begun to accept my comrades’ invitations.

Last night, I went out for drinks with a couple of men from Ufa.

“I thought the director and the designer were going to have a fistfight. And all over whether or not to paint shadows on the set! You should’ve seen them—”

“Lev, it’s Friday,” interrupted Bastian Jaeger, a fellow painter. “Stop talking about work.”

“What else would you have him talk about?” Hugo Kaufmann, a good man and a decent costumer, distributed our beers. “You’d rather talk politics?”

22 Sheffer, “World War I” Professor Sheffer argued that political institutions with limited public involvement were responsible for World War I.

23 Edith Sheffer, “Nazi Germany: From Hyperdemocracy to Dictatorship” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, October 30, 2012). The streets of Berlin were particularly dangerous during the 1920s.

24 Sheffer, “Nazi Germany” Weimar Germany was a place of artistic experimentation.
“Well, politics are important.”

“I’m sick of them. Every day, a new party.25 Every day, a new madman, frothing on his soapbox. How the hell am I supposed to know how to vote? Besides—even if I did, it wouldn’t make a difference.”

“It might if you voted for the National Socialists.” Bastian took a swig. “I heard a pretty good speech the other day. Germany’s broken, bring real change…all that. Imagine—someone actually taking charge.”

“Enough of that, Bastian. Lev’s Russian. We’re boring him.”

Bastian turned to me with sudden interest. “The fellow talked about Russia in that speech. Said it’s a mess over there, ever since the Jewish Bolsheviks took over.26 I don’t know…I know some decent Jews, but there were a lot of traitors here during the War. It was the same in Russia, right?”

I shrugged and said nothing. My drink tasted sour.

“Lev’s a Jew,” said Hugo.

“Ah.” Bastian shot me an embarrassed glance. “Well—that’s all right.”

For the rest of the evening, we discussed trivial things. Even after we parted on good terms, I felt a gnawing sickness. Berlin had lost its shine.

Analysis

Lev perceives himself as merely a visitor to Germany, avoiding local politics completely. His active participation in cinema and the arts, however, contributes to Weimar culture. Nazi ideology was, in part, a reaction to Weimar culture’s modern liberal values and artistic experimentation.

The chaos of Weimar hyperdemocracy made voters feel helpless and apathetic; the fractured government seemed to be making little progress to repair Germany’s broken economy. The Nazis came to power by taking advantage of these citizens, disillusioned with democracy and seeking the order that comes from strong

25 Sheffer, “Nazi Germany” Professor Sheffer described hyperdemocracy in postwar Germany, with its many single-issue parties, as “mass political chaos.”

leadership. Lev is disturbed by the Nazis’ anti-Semitic ideas and the fact that his acquaintance is so easily swayed. Even if Nazi supporters were not particularly anti-Semitic, they focused on other aspects of Nazi ideology, overlooking racial theory. When Lev returns to the Soviet Union in 1923, it is partly due to this increasingly toxic environment.

JANUARY 15, 1923: AMBITIOUS YOUNG MEN

Just when I begin to appreciate Berlin, I’m leaving. Sadder still, I must leave my job painting sets at Ufa. Since The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, film has been my only love. What little I earn, I spend at the cinema.

When fighting broke out in Russia, it was agreed I should stay here. At first, I couldn’t bear to miss the Revolution.27 Since then, however, I’ve heard terrible stories of what is done to the enemy, whether a man or a woman, a Christian or a Jew.28 Now Russia is safe at last, and Lenin has declared film the most important of the arts. I sent my application to many filmmakers, hoping, perhaps, for some position in design. I heard back within a week.

I am going to be an Assistant Director.29

After a ludicrous struggle to confirm my citizenship, visa, and other papers,30 I was on the train to Kharkiv to meet my colleagues. On our way through Kiev, we passed great billboards of Comrade Lenin.31 No more women in plumed hats—just people

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27 Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), 49. Litveiko’s account, despite its pro-revolutionary bias, conveys the excitement felt by many during the early days of the Russian Revolution.

28 Edith Sheffer, “Total Transformation: Communist Revolution, Utopia, and Stalinism” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, October 23, 2012). The White Army and the Bolsheviks both committed atrocities against civilians during the Russian Civil War. Particularly in 1919, a wave of pogroms accompanied the chaos.

29 John Scott, Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia’s City of Steel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989), 4. Scott suggests that the Soviet Union lacked skilled workers in the industrial sector. The same problem arose in the film industry, especially because most Czarist filmmakers had fled Russia. A relatively inexperienced worker could conceivably be thrust into a position of great responsibility because of this lack of experts.

30 Sheffer, “Total Transformation” Professor Sheffer described the communist bureaucracy as slow, corrupt, and inefficient.

31 Sheffer, “Total Transformation” According to Professor Sheffer, communist propaganda took the place of capitalist advertising in many Soviet cities, becoming a common presence in daily life.
in worker’s clothes.\textsuperscript{32} By then I’d read the screenplay, with its rousing message of revolution. Excitement rose within me.

We stopped for lunch at Kiev’s grand station. On my way back from the market, I tossed an orange peel into the gutter. Some peasants had spread a pathetic display of winter herbs on the ground nearby.\textsuperscript{33} One of their scrawny children seized the garbage, eating it then and there.\textsuperscript{34}

The protagonist of our film is a strong, handsome Ukrainian villager. But these people seemed gaunt and ragged in the cold.

\textbf{Analysis}

Lev was always a supporter of revolution, so when he returns to Russia, he is thrilled to find visible manifestations of change. He takes street dress and public propaganda as signs of the bright future heralded by the Bolshevik Revolution, although problems that plagued imperial Russia—such as famine and poverty—still persist. When confronted by the hunger of the peasants, Lev is surprised and disturbed, because the Soviet Government hushed failures such as famine.\textsuperscript{35} Most city dwellers also knew little of life in the country,\textsuperscript{36} except for vague, romanticized stereotypes.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{AUGUST 5, 1942: WAR MACHINES}

Ufa has become another lie-spewing shell, the bastards have driven Fritz Lang away, and I am forced to wonder: Is there no art left in the world these days?

I received a letter from Hugo Kaufmann. He tells me that \textit{Ich klage an} has created quite the stir in Berlin.\textsuperscript{38} The propaganda department hopes to whip up support for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Sheffer, October 23, 2012. Citizens wore clothes like those of ordinary workers and abandoned more bourgeois fashions on the street.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Kathryn Ciancia, “Eastern Europe” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, October 26, 2012). In Eastern European cities, peasants might be seen as vendors of flowers and herbs in the marketplace.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Sheffer, “Total Transformation” The policy of War Communism, compounded by drought in the Ukraine, led to a severe famine in the early 1920s.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Sheffer, “Total Transformation”
\item \textsuperscript{36} Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., \textit{In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), 51. “None of us knew much about village life: we had all grown up in the city…”
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ciancia, “Eastern Europe”
\item \textsuperscript{38} Moeller, 90. According to the report, the film produced a great deal of discussion.
\end{itemize}
the murder of helpless Germans. I want to write Hugo frankly: How could you stay with Ufa? How could you remain a witless cog in the machine? It is the same machine that sculpts the public’s mind—the same machine that would euthanize the old, the sick, the racially impure.

But such questions would be censored. And besides—I already know the answer. By the time the arrests of the “formalists” began, I had Kalyna and the children to think of first. One by one, my friends and colleagues disappeared; their positions filled by ambitious young sycophants who worship Stalin as a god. Each of my films is more soulless than the last. And where have they gotten us? Safe in Alma-Ata, riding out the War.

I wish I could be pleased.

Analysis

Nazi persecution was able to take hold because of government propaganda, which sought to convince Germans of the righteousness of the Nazi cause. Films such as Ich klage an attempted the public’s moral reconfiguration. Resistance to Nazi ideology was limited by passivity and fear—like Lev, many “cogs in the machine” had families. Few were willing to risk everything to rebel. In an atmosphere where even a joke could lead to arrest, Germans had to be willing to face death for any active resistance. Facing a similarly oppressive situation in the Soviet Union, Lev grudgingly relates to the dilemma faced by those working for the Nazi regime.

1949: RUBBLE FILMS

During the Occupation, the city of my childhood was drowned in Jewish blood. When I heard what my former neighbors had done, I felt sick. Shame consumed me from the inside-out.

I was in Alma-Ata, I think. The only thing that saved my Slavic wife and mongrel children were those awful, shallow, Stalinist films.

39 Edith Sheffer, “The Racial State: Propagating and Purging” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, November 1, 2012). The program supported by the film called for the euthanization of the indefinitely ill, as well as other “drains on society.”

40 Moeller ed., 162.

41 Moeller ed., 164. For example, Hans and Sophie Scholl, as well as other members of the resistance group The White Rose, were executed for their anti-Nazi pamphlet and graffiti campaign.

When I got the news at the end of the War, I knew where to shoot my next picture. I wanted to film the utter devastation. I am also required to film some spark of hope, though I cannot believe it exists.

It’s strange that I should return to Odessa only after there’s no one to visit.

***

When we walk through the streets, Kalyna asks me to point out the places I remember. I still recognize parts of the city, but they are surreal, like places in a dream. The people are ragged and hungry. The streetcars aren’t running. Whole buildings ceased to exist in the Siege. I soon discovered the IRO (International Refugee Organization) flyers: photographs of skinny Jewish children, holding up signs chalked with their names. I was on my way to work when a picture, ripped off by the wind, blew into my feet. I snatched it to pin it back up, but then I saw the face.

*Spektor, Iakov*, said the sign.

It was my nephew.

***

The boy is quiet, small for his age. He gets along with the other children, and he seems pleased that he is going to be our son. A long time passed, however, before I felt I could ask about Akmechetka. I would spare him the pain altogether, but I have to know my sister’s fate.

We were alone. I served tea.

“*Iakov, do you know what happened to your mother?”*

“She’s dead.”

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43 Edith Sheffer, “Zero Hour: Armageddon and Aftermath” (Lecture, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, November 8, 2012). In the Soviet Union, the postwar period was characterized by rationing and shortages.

44 Sheffer, “Zero Hour” Transportation systems were often disrupted by the war.

45 Sheffer, “Zero Hour” City landscapes were significantly altered by wartime bombing.

46 A concentration camp to which many Odessan Jews were deported during Odessa’s occupation.
“When’s the last time you saw her?”

“At the camp.” He was silent for a long time. He drank, his face still expressionless. “They had a selection. She didn’t pass. They took her away.”

As he spoke, my eyes filled with tears. I’m not sure if they were for the boy or for my sister. Regardless, I gripped his bony shoulder with one hand.

“I’ll never let anyone hurt you again.”

Iakov hesitated, then nodded. I doubt he believed me.

Analysis
As Lev learns more about the Holocaust, his survivor’s guilt worsens. He attempts to compensate for it by pledging to protect his orphaned nephew. Lev’s experience of the Holocaust is one of disillusioned hindsight—while in Alma-Ata, he was convinced of his own helplessness. Now he is angry for what happened to his family, his culture, and the world he used to know, but he is unsure of who to blame—the Russians, the Germans, the Nazis, or, in part, himself. This feeling of helpless frustration is characteristic of the “muddled majority,” whose passivity permitted the rise of the Nazi regime.

JUNE 1991: REFLECTIONS
When I think back on my life, there is one day I remember more clearly than any. Every word, every movement, was amplified by dread.

“For the most part, Comrade Turovsky, you produce very good work,” said the Inspector. “But this film…it’s not like the others. Do you know why?”

“It’s the only decent picture I’ve ever made.”

“The Siege of Odessa” is not a proletarian film. It portrays…moral ambiguity.”

“With all due respect, Comrade Inspector, it’s about the Occupation. There were shades of gray.”

47 Robert G. Moeller ed., “A Young Girl’s ‘Lucky Accident’ at Auschwitz in 1944,” The Nazi State and German Society: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 151. The selections of inmates who could continue working or would be exterminated were brutal and arbitrary.
He stared at me for a moment. Then he glanced down at his files. “Comrade Turovsky, *The Siege of Odessa* is not in keeping with the standards of socialist realism. It is an anti-Soviet film.”

“Anti-Soviet?” I cried.

I had been a Soviet for almost my entire life. The Inspector ignored me and read on.

“Reel production will stop immediately. All existing copies must be destroyed.”

I could hear the blood pounding in my ears.

“And what will become of me?”

*Ostracized.*

Deported.

Lost.

“As a formalist,” said the Inspector, “you cannot be permitted to direct.”


After all traces of my picture had gone up in flames, I kept working. Now I manage production schedules, equipment transport, and other logistical tasks. The work is dull, I have lost my privileges, and my young superiors treat me with disdain. As things stand, I’m not happy. But my family is safe, my children are married, and I know I will die an honest man. I spent so long living in fear, only to wish I’d told a truthful story long before.

*The Siege of Odessa* may not have been a masterpiece. I’ll never know how it would have been received. Something is hidden in our apartment, however. It’s a secret that only Kalyna and I share: one last bootleg copy.

I have seen the world change so utterly. Someday, perhaps, I can still have my premiere.
Analysis
The most determinative event in Lev’s life was Stalin’s rise to power. The restrictions imposed under Stalin’s rule compelled Lev to create propaganda out of fear for himself and his family. Living in the USSR, surrounded by the pressure to conform, Lev preemptively censored his own films. As Slavenka Drakulić proposes, this “autocensorship” was internalized due to the constant presence of the state.48

Lev’s willingness to collaborate for so many years, despite his hatred of Stalin, is due to a worldview developed under the Soviet dictatorship—the state was to be anonymously outsmarted, all while maintaining “limited risk.”49 Lev’s survivor’s guilt eventually shifted this worldview. Accepting that the risk was worthwhile, he silenced his internal censor and challenged the state with one last film.

Beautifully-written and organized, Jonas’s paper, “Achieving Agency Through Fortune,” is an exceptional work by a first-year student. In an in-depth analysis of the two pivotal characters in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—Hamlet and his counterpart Claudius—Jonas successfully shows how the concept of human agency is aligned with the rule of “outrageous fortune” in the play. The author’s awareness of different levels of interpretation, as well as his inclusion of the characters’ own interpretations of present events gives this paper its appeal. He correctly identifies the play’s turning point, and how Shakespeare orchestrated the scenes to stage the existential battle between our actions and the events we deem to be “outcomes” of them. As Shakespeare would like us to believe, “fortune” wins the day. But Jonas ingeniously demonstrates to the reader that human agency still matters in that outcomes depend on our acknowledgment of fortune’s role in determining our actions.

With his paper, Jonas more than fulfilled our expectations, which included not only a mature treatment of the play but also a thoughtful inclusion of the three lectures our students heard on *Hamlet*. Jonas’s paper shows independent judgment and an impressive understanding of different kinds of material. His argumentation is thorough and most convincing.

—Anne Pollok
In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the central dichotomy between Hamlet, the vengeful son, and Claudius, the scheming usurper, presents an intriguing view of the role of so-called “outrageous fortune” in determining the course of human lives. Both of these characters are planners and plotters, traits that imply a belief in the power of human agency, a force with which fortune might reasonably be expected to conflict – for if chance wholly governed, human agency would be no more than a mere illusion (Taylor, 10/16). But while Claudius’s constant attempts to assert control over the court of Elsinore through his agency show an apparent disregard for, or perhaps even a fear of, fortune’s influence, Hamlet’s actions demonstrate that he fully recognizes the power of fortune and, in important moments, even learns to embrace it, which ultimately serves not to handicap but to empower him in his quest for vengeance. Examination of the text reveals that Hamlet’s willingness to capitulate to fortune actually allows him to assert his agency more effectively, and this is why he ultimately realizes his revenge even in the face of death while Claudius’s carefully constructed plots collapse at the play’s tragic end.

Both Hamlet’s and Claudius’s views on fortune can, at least initially, be established in relation to the situation in which the two characters find themselves as *Hamlet* opens. Claudius, for his part, assumes the role of the “mastermind;” his position as the new king of Denmark and husband of Gertrude has been achieved fully through his own conniving and intrigue. Because he holds this coveted position of power, he naturally fears the disruptive power of fortune, and continually asserts his agency to maintain as much control as possible, most importantly by keeping Hamlet...
(whom he correctly views as a rogue element and a threat) under close watch so as to minimize the potential danger he presents. Hamlet, meanwhile, is thrust into the role of the “victim,” as his world begins to fall apart through the machinations of forces well beyond his control. Though he does attempt to formulate a plan of revenge so as to assert some amount of agency over the situation, his attempts to make sense of the unfortunate circumstances certainly acknowledge the hand of fortune in his predicament, which deepens his sense of despair and holds him back from taking resolute action in the first half of the play. This baseline understanding of each character’s attitudes is the starting point from which the concept of fortune will be developed in relationship to this particular dichotomy over the course of the play.

It should be noted that the line between fortune and human agency isn’t actually as distinct as one might believe in this particular instance. What Hamlet calls “[suffering] the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (3.1.57-58) results directly from a situation that is the product of Claudius’s actions, or agency – here, the two are essentially flip sides of the same coin. However, a clearly defined distinction is not necessary to this analysis. Whether or not the political and family crisis that so badly distresses Hamlet represents the “workings of fortune” by some concrete definition is irrelevant; all that matters is that Hamlet believes it does – he explicitly identifies “outrageous fortune” as the force compelling him to suicidal thoughts. This mental juxtaposition between fortune and agency is vital, as it will inform the all-important shift in Hamlet’s attitude regarding each that is demonstrated in the transition from The Murder of Gonzago to the murder of Polonius.

Hamlet’s staging of “The Mousetrap,” a clever ploy designed to lure the King’s guilt into the open, represents both the pinnacle and the limit of his scheming. The play was, in essence, meant to counter fortune; it sought remove the element of chance from Hamlet’s revenge scheme by confirming Claudius’s guilt and thereby ensuring that the ghost of King Hamlet was not a devil who, in Hamlet’s words, “Out of my weakness and my melancholy, / As he is very potent with such spirits, / Abuses me to damn me” (2.2.613-615). Since the question of potential damnation is one with fairly high stakes, it’s understandable that Hamlet might want to alleviate himself of such concerns before moving ahead with his plans. But while “The Mousetrap” was carefully calculated to expose the king’s crimes, there was no follow-up to accompany it; Hamlet never actually devised a concrete plan for Claudius’s execution once he’d been proven guilty. Interestingly enough, in this absence of a clear path of action, Hamlet’s behavior transitions from subtle scheming based on precise intentions to
an adaptable opportunism reactive primarily to the whims of circumstance – he begins to allow fortune, rather than reasoned intent, to become the catalyst for his actions. The scene of Hamlet’s arrival in Gertrude’s quarters offers clear evidence of this shift. When he hears Polonius behind the arras, Hamlet’s killing thrust is not the result of a careful, well-considered judgment call but a reflexive reaction to what he perceives as an opportunity presented by fortune. His first question after the murder (“Is it the King?” (3.4.28)) and his comment upon seeing the body (“I took thee for thy better” (3.4.33)) reveal that his vengeance has transformed into something much less thoughtful and much more visceral, where it is acceptable to stab first and ask later. It is, as Gertrude describes it, “a rash and bloody deed” (3.4.29), and in and of itself it is also a failure and a tragedy, but it is evidence that, suddenly, Hamlet has become an agent of fortune rather than a victim. This is not a choice he makes consciously, but it comes through clearly in the quality of his actions. It seems likely that, with “The Mousetrap” having lifted uncertainty about pursuing vengeance from his conscience, Hamlet feels freer to simply take opportunities as they come, rather than constantly going through the introspective mental gymnastics that made his early attempts to resolve upon revenge “failures of intention without action” (Landy, 10/11).

By affirming so dramatically his ability to act decisively and erratically (as fortune would dictate), Hamlet inspires a new fear in Claudius, who recognizes the danger Hamlet poses to him and feels his sense of control slowly slipping away. From this point forward, the play becomes almost a battleground, with the agent of fortune pitted against the controlling schemer in two major bouts. The first, and lesser, of these occurs when Claudius conspires to have Hamlet executed in England; Hamlet takes advantage of fortune’s auspices to not only escape his fate but have his traitorous friends beheaded in his place. The point at which the opposition comes to a head, however, is in the final scene, the duel between Laertes and Hamlet. Both Hamlet and Claudius exemplify their respective character archetypes in this scene. Claudius, ever cautious, always desiring to be as certain as possible of a positive outcome, notes to Laertes that “this project / Should have a back or second, that might hold / If this did blast in proof” (4.7.152-154), referring to the poisoned chalice that will serve as backup if Laertes’s sword fails to injure its target. Hamlet, on the other hand, whom Claudius correctly refers to as “free from all contriving” (4.7.134-135), enters the bout honestly despite his misgivings, telling Horatio, “Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what / is’t to leave betimes?” (5.2.224-225); this is truly the attitude of the agent of fortune, who accepts even the chance of death with such
grace. In the end, the result of this tragic conflict—the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius himself—reveal the extent to which fortune thwarted even Claudius's best, most carefully laid plans. Although Laertes's poisoned sword did successfully end Hamlet's life, that victory is hollow, as Hamlet's death was never the ultimate goal, but simply a means to an end: the protection of, in Claudius's words, “those effects for which I did the murder, / my crown, mine own ambition, and my queen” (3.3.54-55). All of these were lost to Claudius when Gertrude, by chance, drank the poisoned wine, or when Laertes, having by chance been wounded with his own poison, reveals the scheme to Hamlet, who as the true agent of fortune takes advantage of his final moments to poison Claudius doubly and ensure his life's end.

And what of Hamlet? It's difficult to say that he was victorious, in light of his own death and the massive collateral damage left in his wake. But in the end, he achieved his stated goal for revenge: to catch the King “about some act / that has no relish of salvation in't – / Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, / And that his soul may be as damned and black / As hell, whereto it goes” (3.3.93-94). Claudius tried to deny fortune, and his failure cost him everything; but Hamlet learned to accept it, even to embrace it when it turned his way, and as a result he was ultimately able to complete his mission, even in the final moments of his life. Through his story, Shakespeare offers us a valuable lesson: fortune is only the enemy if you work against her; rather, we should learn like Horatio to take “Fortune's buffets and rewards / ...with equal thanks” (3.2.69-70).

WORKS CITED
INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

For the final paper in “Bioethical Challenges of New Technology,” students were asked to write a research paper defending an ethical position that we as a society ought to take with respect to a technology covered during the course. Rosemary chose to examine issues concerning the ethical challenges presented by neurocognitive enhancement, which refers to the enhancement of cognitive function through a variety of possible means, such as pharmaceuticals or invasive therapies. The ethics related to the use of neurocognitive enhancers involves questions of safety, fairness, authenticity or personhood, and coercion, among others. Rosemary focused her paper on non-prescription use of Adderall and Ritalin for cognitive enhancement and the question of indirect coercion—whether people feel undue pressure to take these drugs in order to perform competitively with peers. Her paper set forth her perspective on the issue of indirect coercion with persuasive clarity. Rosemary impressively integrated perspectives from theorists on different sides of this ethical debate into her analysis, and critically engaged their arguments in a penetrating and insightful manner. Her essay demonstrated an exceptional ability to structure a convincing argument and a remarkable depth of understanding of the material.

—Nicole Martinez-Martin
From the stripping of cycling “antihero” Lance Armstrong’s seven Tour de France titles to the snubbing of “chief supervillain of the modern steroid era” Barry Bonds’ place in the baseball Hall of Fame, human performance enhancement has long been a subject of heightened sentiments and frenzied public dispute (Galusha). While it is unlikely that we will see either a decline in the use of physical performance enhancers or a calming of public outcry about “cheating” in sports, the arena has begun to change focus. Neurocognitive enhancement, or “cosmetic neurology” as it is sometimes called, has existed as a topic of controversy on the peripheries of public and legal awareness for several decades (Cakic 611). However, technological advancements and usage trends have recently placed this realm of human enhancement at the vanguard of debate.

Neurocognitive enhancement has many forms, but perhaps the most ethically fraught today is the use of “nootropics,” ingestible drugs that chemically alter processes in the brain and are purported to enhance memory and attention (among other functions). This paper will consider specifically the nootropic medicines Ritalin and Adderall, both commonly prescribed as treatments for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Drugs for the treatment of ADHD have been available since the 1950s, but during the fifteen years before 2002 the rate of prescription for stimulants to treat ADHD increased by 500%—and the trend has likely continued over the last decade (NIMH). Because ADHD medications are nootropics shown to improve some cognitive capacities in attention-disordered individuals, this growth in the number of prescriptions has (perhaps predictably) contributed to an unprecedented
availability for and incidence of non-prescription Ritalin and Adderall use by healthy individuals (Arria and DuPont, Garnier-Dykstra). Use of these medications by people not diagnosed with ADHD has raised numerous ethical concerns, ranging from the authenticity of human-environmental interactions while drugged to fears of furthering socioeconomic disparity (Bostrom). This paper focuses on and seeks to uphold an element of the debate that is often broached, but rarely given due weight in ethical reviews: the concern of indirect coercion.

The topic of coercion is typically divided and acknowledged in two parts. Direct coercion, typified by compulsory ingestion of nootropics for employees in certain positions or for ADHD students in some districts, is generally considered unethical except in specific circumstances wherein lack of the drug might jeopardize general safety (e.g., military positions) (Greely et al. 703, Bostrom and Sandberg 328). However, indirect coercion—an individual’s feeling of being pressured into nootropic use in order to compete with peers—is often dismissed as an inconsequential side effect of respect for autonomous choice (Bostrom and Sandberg 328, Greely et al. 703, Farah et al. 423, Cakic 613). But if it can be established that neurocognitive enhancement may cause indirect coercion, this will certainly be a substantial public concern and may prove to be an insuperable, if under-recognized, obstacle in proclaiming cognitive enhancement by the healthy “morally sound.”

Critical to the assertion that nootropic use creates potential for indirect coercion is that their use also represents a “positional good”: a positional good is a resource that has value only so long as it remains limited, or a resource that derives its value from its limited nature (Hirsch 11). Positional goods are contrasted with inherent goods, such as food, shelter and affection, which have benefits defined by internal and individual measures. Although regulation of inherent goods is not out of the question (in instances of shortage, for example), it may be near impossible to declare ownership or use of an inherent good unethical. The autonomous choice to gain an inherent good simply does not have any ideological effect on others’ choices to gain the same inherent good. However, as a positional good, each non-prescription use of cognitive enhancers has the unique characteristic of fundamentally altering the landscape of and motivation for nootropic use. For example, when no students in a given classroom are currently using nootropics, some motives for their use (although varied) are seemingly “inherent” and innocuous: a student may wish to level an already-imbalanced academic field or to study with greater ease, for example. As soon as even a single student’s non-prescription stimulant use becomes known, there is the perception that another level of limited advantage, unfairness or unevenness is
created; ultimately, when it is perceived that a large portion of students are utilizing the enhancement, non-users may feel strongly coerced by their circumstances into using the nootropics—just to reach what had previously been the perceived “normal” comparison to peers. But many have contended that this argument does not stand; they posit that nootropic use may have intrinsic or composite/societal benefit, rather than strictly competitive or positional value.

Bostrom and Sandberg give two reasons for nootropics’ failure to qualify as a positional good. First, they claim that enhanced creativity (as an example of improved cognitive function) is “valuable in its own right”: that is, an individual might find improved cognitive abilities inherently advantageous or appreciable, with no respect to the abilities of his peers—thus, the good is not positional (328). While it is likely true that some individuals would find intrinsic value in enhanced cognitive function, this has little practical weight. Research has identified academic success and competition as the consistent and overwhelming motive for non-prescription ADHD medication use among college students (Garnier-Dykstra 226). Where surveys have indicated a consumer preference for service workers on stimulants, it is not difficult to imagine that a drive to remain academically competitive might translate into motives for economic and job competition (Bostrom and Sandberg 328). Bostrom and Sandberg’s second assertion is that widespread use of nootropics might have tangible benefits for a society. As they put it, society’s “many pressing problems…would be more readily solved if its members were smarter, wiser, or more creative” (328). However, while the effects of stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin in healthy individuals are poorly understood, possible gains in cognitive function seem modest at best—meaning there would likely be little actual benefit to society, or perhaps even to the individual (Allman 1471, Ilieva 496). Rather, healthy individuals on ADHD stimulants may just perceive their cognition as being enhanced (Ilieva 496). This is vital. There need not be any actual cognitive advantage to nootropic use to cause indirect coercion; rather, so long as the motives for use of nootropics are perceived academic success and competition—both relative measures—nootropic use must primarily be identified as a positional good, and is therefore capable of causing indirect coercion. The possibility that nootropic enhancement provides little or no actual benefit only debases arguments set to defend non-prescription drug use.

Though it appears evident that nootropic drug use has the intrinsic potential to create indirect coercion, this does not necessarily render it unethical if its alternatives may be more objectionable. Specifically, the alternative to a moral restriction of
nootropic use by the healthy is generally thought to be a moral restriction of the “free choice” to use these drugs. This dichotomy is perhaps the single most common point referenced in dismissing the argument of indirect coercion, and is particularly well illustrated with Farah’s comments on the issue: “[restriction of nootropic use] denies people the freedom to practice a safe means of self improvement, just to eliminate any negative consequences of the (freely taken) choice not to enhance” (Farah et al. 423). Many ethicists and writers echo these comments, among them Greely and Cakic, but claims such as this commit three grave errors: the long-term safety of nootropics (amphetamines like Adderall in particular) is poorly understood, and almost nothing is known of the potential for additional side effects in healthy individuals; the effectiveness of nootropics as an actual means of cognitive “improvement” has not been conclusively demonstrated in healthy individuals; and the force of indirect coercion in the case of nootropics does not come from a superficial desire to excel or to impress, but from a need to follow the ordered “life scripts” we have created and esteemed as a society.

Although frequently prescribed and widely touted as quick fixes for behavioral and attention deficits, Ritalin and Adderall are not without known risks. In individuals with ADHD (for whom the medications have been most thoroughly studied), both drugs have a laundry list of observed side effects. Sleep deprivation resulting from the continued use or abuse of these addictive drugs has been known to frequently cause problems with depression, motor function and general cardiovascular and cerebrovascular health (Cakic 613, Arria and DuPont). In extreme cases, the drug and associated insomnia may cause psychosis and more serious mental health disorders (Schwarz). These concerns are of particular weight when considering that use of ADHD medication by healthy individuals (not incorrectly diagnosed with ADHD) is by a vast majority illicit, and that these factions are extremely unlikely to have received accurate information about the risks associated with Adderall and Ritalin use and addiction (Arria and DuPont, Garnier-Dykstra). Additionally, as was previously discussed, little evidence exists to demonstrate any valuable or even tangible gain in cognitive functioning for healthy individuals—it can hardly be said that allowing the use of these nootropics protects any freedom to practice a “safe means of self improvement” if these drugs have neither been proven safe nor an actual means of improvement (Ilieva 496, Farah et al. 423).

In the United States and across the democratic world there is a high bar set for the restriction of individual liberties, and it is a common and easy choice to reference autonomy in dismissing the validity of indirect coercion. But rather than assuming
it inferior to the individual “liberty” of choosing to consume a nootropic, it is necessary to consider the contexts of coercion. Nootropic use is often likened to performance enhancement in sports; although both accomplish similar tasks on the surface, the motivators for neurological enhancement are embedded much more profoundly in the foundation of our society. The professional athlete must compete not only for his pride and for his titles, but also for his livelihood. In this way, his motives in pursuing performance enhancement are not necessarily shallow or immoral. Still, the lifestyle of a professional athlete is niche and, although lauded and created by our society, is not representational of our ideals. Desire for cognitive enhancement, however, comes from the impregnable societal scripts dictating human life’s rightful order: education, higher education, career, and family. We have deemed these scripts so valuable that we place them *above individual freedom* by mandating schooling for all youth. In placing ordered expectations on all of our citizens, and in forcing them to conform to a set of structures and goals perhaps not well fit to their tendencies or aptitudes, we have developed a society in which “The Red Queen Principle applies… an individual must continue developing in order to maintain their fitness relative to others with whom they are competing. Ergo, a student must make use of every possible advantage afforded to them” (Cakic 612). In this context, a student who perceives coercion to consume nootropics is not simply at a loss of his competitive edge if he chooses not to. He is at a loss of fundamental qualities held dear to our culture—academic and career success and the ability to raise a family—and at a loss of the ability to follow societal scripts. And in choosing to take the drugs, he may risk these same qualities.

This argument is meant to serve only as a justification for further consideration of indirect coercion in decisions regarding nootropic policy; it is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the ethical debate. Although the preceding pages demonstrate that indirect coercion is both an inherent possibility and a profound concern if actualized, it is beyond the scope of this paper to make policy recommendations: development of more effective and innocuous methods of neurocognitive enhancement may nullify some arguments made in this paper. Additionally, there may be other elements of the debate that prove to override concerns raised here. However, going forward, it is hoped that some elements of this discussion will elicit more careful inclusion of indirect coercion in further ethical review.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


WINTER 2013 HONORABLE MENTION

Kara Fong

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

In her paper, “The Dehumanizing Dangers of Biblical Interpretation,” Kara presents a complex and compelling investigation of Margaret Atwood’s novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, as a retelling of the biblical narrative of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar. Through a close reading of Offred, a handmaid in Atwood’s dystopian society of Gilead, Kara shows how literalistic biblical interpretation sets rigid gender roles that limit both the social reality and self-conception of women. The paper stands out for the way it weaves together many texts from our course and extends central themes from lecture, connecting the novel with issues in contemporary American society like reproductive rights. Kara offers original insights from her reading and presents a layered analysis dealing with the darker aspects of interpretation and storytelling in our search for ultimate meanings.

— Kathleen Tierney
The Dehumanizing Dangers of Biblical Interpretation

Kara Fong

Stories have always been means of shaping culture – they can pass down traditions, explain the workings of the world, and even influence our social roles and how we interact with one another. Yet this influential power also presents a more dangerous side to the act of storytelling: while stories can be used to fantasize about a more pleasant, just world, their interpretations can also be twisted to justify prejudices and inequality. Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* explores this dangerous nature of storytelling by presenting a retelling of the Abraham story of Genesis. Women in the novel are pressured to conform to rigid societal roles dictated by a very literal, one-dimensional interpretation of the Bible in which they become defined by nothing more than their ability to produce offspring. Forcing these women, particularly the handmaids, to fit into this biblical mold begins to strip them of their humanness – the imposition of these ‘biblical values’ devalues the handmaids’ intellect and feelings, suppresses their individuality, and produces scarring emotional effects that distance them from experiencing the fullness of humanity. Atwood incorporates this dehumanization to draw attention to the danger and unjustness of dictating women’s societal roles with such a literal reading of the Bible. However, her condemnation of those who ignore the complexities of the Bible and its more liberal interpretations doesn’t just speak to the fictional society of Gilead. Atwood invites her readers to compare her dystopia with present-day American society, intimating that we are not free of the types of biblical pressures facing women in Gilead, and that by censuring the Gileadeans we are also implicating ourselves and the way that we use stories to legitimize injustice.
Atwood’s society of Gilead is constructed based on a very narrow interpretation of the Bible that views childbearing as a woman’s only useful contribution. Based on God’s command in Genesis 1.28 to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Atwood, 88), the Gileadeans reduce the role of women to a mere biological process, thereby ignoring and devaluing their thoughts and feelings. Much of the language used to describe the handmaids dehumanizes them based on this societal role, such as when Offred describes the Commander in the Ceremony as “no more to [her] than a bee is to a flower” (Atwood, 161) and when she thinks of herself as “a melon on a stem” (Atwood, 154). Offred equates her role as handmaid to the act of pollination and literally bearing fruit, which coincides with a very literal reading of the biblical idea of being fruitful.

Atwood extends the idea that the handmaids’ only usefulness is their bodies by depicting the handmaids not only as part of the biological reproductive process, but as mere vessels for holding children. This portrayal of the handmaids stems from the story of Hagar in Genesis Chapter 16, which forms the central model around which all of Gilead is based. Just like Hagar, the handmaids are more like possessions than human beings, slaves to be used wherever society deems fit (wherever they can be used to produce offspring). This portrayal is exemplified just after the Ceremony, for instance, when Offred reflects, “We are containers, it’s only the insides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut” (Atwood, 96). She dehumanizes herself through comparisons to objects as nondescript as a container and insignificant as a nutshell, emphasizing that to her society she is nothing more than a generic means of increasing the population. Similarly, upon reflecting on her failure to get pregnant from the Commander, Offred thinks that society sees her as “just a boat with no cargo, a chalice with no wine in it, an oven – to be crude – minus the bun” (Atwood, 163). Based on this description, a handmaid that is not pregnant is essentially useless; like an empty ship, cup, or oven, she is not fulfilling the only purpose for which she has been designed.

This representation of women based purely on their bodies, rather than their emotions or intellect, resonates with Atwood’s goal of making a larger critique on the role of biblical interpretation in modern American society (Lecture, February 11). The use of the Bible to justify controlling women’s rights to get an abortion, for example, often fails to consider a woman’s thoughts or feelings towards the issue and only considers her body’s physical role in holding a baby, just as the Gileadeans diminish the handmaids’ opinions regarding controlling their bodies.
By dramatizing the handmaids’ struggle in such issues, Atwood creates parallels with the use of biblical interpretation in our own society, suggesting that modern day America is not as far from the dystopian nature of Gilead as we might assume.

Much of the injustice behind this suppression of women’s rights lies in the fact that it ignores individuals’ unique circumstances, personalities, and desires. In fact, issues of conformity form one of Atwood’s most powerful dehumanization techniques in emphasizing the wrongs of the Gileadean treatment of women. From their red uniforms to their formulaic names, society treats the handmaids as a single entity – the social roles defined by Gilead’s literal reading of Genesis stifle their individuality. On her way to the Prayvaganza, for example, Offred notices the conformity enforced by the strict structure of Gilead, thinking that the handmaids look “picturesque, like Dutch milkmaids on a wallpaper frieze, like a shelf full of period-costume ceramic salt and pepper shakers…or anything else that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation” (Atwood, 212). This homogeneity, while it creates order that is “soothing to the eye” (Atwood, 212) and coincides with Gilead’s expectations for all of the handmaids to fill the biblical mold of Hagar, is inherently superficial and ultimately highlights the injustices of the Gileadean treatment of women. By dictating such rigidly-defined social roles that don’t allow for individuality, the Gileadean society trivializes the handmaids, instilling them with qualities as inconsequential and inhuman as wallpaper or pepper shakers.

By drawing attention to the dehumanizing effects of this forced conformity of women in Gilead, Atwood makes a broader condemnation of the use of biblical interpretation to suppress individuality. In response to the resurgence of Christian ideals found in America during the 1980s and the Reagan era concept of the “moral majority,” she rejects the idea that biblical values can create a just set of social standards that can be fairly applied to everyone (Lecture, February 11). Making broad generalization about the needs of an entire social class ignores individuals’ multi-dimensionality – like the characters in the Bible, members of both Gilead and modern society are “fraught with background” and possess unique depth and layers of complexity (Auerbach). Just as the Gileadean interpretation of the Abraham story fails to include Hagar’s actions outside of her role to bear children, such as when she becomes one of the Bible’s few special people who sees the face of God and lives (Gen. 16.10), Gilead suppresses the complex histories and personalities of the handmaids that make them fully human. Through this issue of stifling individuality, Atwood once again calls attention to the injustices that inherently arise from one-sided biblical interpretations, both in the fictional society of Gilead and modern America.
These injustices don’t just apply to the ways in which women and their roles are viewed by society, however. Atwood also explores this issue on a deeper level by addressing the ways in which the enforcement of literal biblical interpretations dehumanizes women’s sense of self. Drawing from biblical passages such as when “Sarai dealt harshly with [Hagar]” (Gen. 16.6), the upper ranks of Gileadean society use examples of biblical mistreatment of women to justify abuse of the handmaids. Upon first meeting Serena Joy, for example, Offred notes, “They can hit us, there’s Scriptural precedent” (Atwood, 16). Similarly, based on this society’s interpretation of the creation story of Genesis, women are inherently at fault: they must “be saved by childbearing” and “learn silence with all subjection” due to the fact that Eve was deceived in the Garden of Eden, not Adam (Atwood, 221). These biblical readings are used to legitimize the subjugation of women in ways that emotionally scar the handmaids. When reflecting on the loneliness and lack of freedom in her life, for example, Offred compares herself to an object as delicate as glass, claiming, “I feel like the word shatter” (Atwood, 103) – she has effectively been irreparably broken by society. She also describes weeping over Luke as “[sitting] in this chair and [oozing] like a sponge” (Atwood, 227). Offred does not fully feel human even when performing the quintessentially human act of crying; rather, her actions hold the negative, unemotional connotations of oozing. By using the Bible to justify taking away her freedom and loved ones, society has reduced her circumstances to such an extreme that she no longer even describes herself as human.

This dehumanization highlights the horrible emotional effects that can come from living in such a cruel society. As is the case with the other forms of dehumanization that Atwood employs, this cruelty invites the novel’s readers to compare the injustices of Gilead with those of modern day America. This subjugation of women based on the stories of Genesis is not just a phenomenon unique to Gilead: feminists since the 19th century, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, have noted that our society’s male-dominated interpretations of the Bible have been used to legitimize biases against women throughout history (Lecture, February 11). These parallels between the nature of biblical interpretation in American society and Gilead suggest that modern women, like the handmaids, also struggle with the dehumanizing emotional effects of these prejudices.

Atwood’s portrayal of the society of Gilead horrifies its readers with its biblically-justified dehumanization of women: the novel’s handmaids are valued only for their usefulness in bearing children, resulting in loss of individuality and scarring emotional consequences. Yet through the myriad parallels between the injustices
facing the handmaids and the feminist struggles of America today, Atwood implicitly points out that modern day society is more similar to this dystopian world than many of us realize. In this sense, the historical notes at the close of the novel ultimately serve as an ironic rebuke against our tendency to elevate ourselves above the follies of other societies. Contrary to the address given by Professor Pietxoto, Atwood suggests that we cannot merely dismiss the cruelties facing Gileadean women as “culture-specific” and “factors from which we are happily more free” (Atwood, 302). Rather, we must recognize that by censuring the Gileadeans we should gain a deeper understanding of the flaws of our own society: we too use literal biblical interpretations to justify prejudice, and we too would do well to reevaluate our attitudes toward women.

WORKS CITED
Essays from
Structured Liberal Education
Stanford University

Boothe Prize Winners
INTRODUCTION

Writing well is among the highest priorities for students in Structured Liberal Education (SLE). They know that effective writing, founded upon critical reading skills, interpretive insights, and clarity of thought, is indispensable for superior work in class and later in professional life. They also learn the pleasures of writing, of clarifying and deepening their passing thoughts and reflections by committing them to paper.

Selecting a paper for the SLE Boothe Prize each year is always difficult because so many students present excellent expository prose on the classic works of literature and philosophy that comprise the SLE curriculum. The Boothe Prize winner, then, stands for and celebrates the accomplishments of all our students and their understanding of writing’s importance and pleasures.

—Carolyn Lougee Chappell
Faculty Director, Structured Liberal Education
The essay begins with a series of deceptively simple definitions of the archive, but its chief interest is the way that something obviously material—what Brian describes as being “an unmistakably physical thing”—is imbricated in complex processes through which it is engaged with the world outside its narrow repository and by which our relationship to the world is itself mediated.

And that is where things begin to get strange and those material products of the past—“objects from another time”—exceed the neat status of “records” or “documents” and their value not contained in the “mere gain of information” but in integrally meaningful historical narratives. But just exactly how we get there is a real question. For, as Brian shows us, meaning is compressed in these objects and the process of compression is itself outwardly mysterious. If the meaning of the archive-object (including, most obviously, its historical significance) is to be found, Brian suggests that it has everything to do with how we perceive and materially interact with it. According to this reading, it is in the “experiential weight” of this interaction that the curious leap from the object’s flat materiality (what might be called its “factual” quality) to its embodiment of social relations (what Brian calls its “extra-factual” quality) becomes legible. A central aspect of Brian’s essay, then, is the attempt to track the processes by which the archive-as-object becomes imbued with that extra-factual valence, such that it doesn’t merely represent nor record social relations, but is perceived to be—citing Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism—“independent beings endowed with life.” This is the archive-fetish.

Complementing Marx’ notion of commodity fetishism with Lévi-Strauss’ theory of fetish objects, and applying both theories to a concrete example of archive-fetish (the Hoover Institution at Stanford), Brian offers a fresh consideration of the problem of how objects mediate one’s perceptual engagement in a way that does not leave one outside of history, but squarely at its center. “The conjured history belongs not to the object, but to us,” Brian ends his essay. It’s a bold claim to make since it seems to counter Marx’ own view that commodity fetishism originates from dissociation and is “the fantastic form of a relation between things.” But I think it’s a way of saying that the archive-fetish, in both dispossessing us and claiming us, allows us to draw meaning in the history it makes possible as an enlivened thing.

—Yoon Sook Cha

2 Marx, 321.
The Archive—Fetish

Brian Tich

“we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable” —William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ARCHIVE

A collection of documents. A resting place for tangible records of human activity. An aggregation of materials, coalescing around the history to which they attest. In her essay, “Cannon and Archive,” the theorist Aleida Assmann calls the archive “the reference memory of a society […which] provides a kind of counterbalance against the necessarily reductive and restrictive drive of the working memory” (337). Assmann envisions the archive as a collective object that contains the materials out of which history is crafted—history, the narrative actively used by society to define itself and its coming-to-be. As narrative, history can never encompass the totality of the past, not only for the sake of pragmatism, but also because the narrative’s ability to define is predicated on its selectivity, its impulse to discriminate among what is more and less meaningful in order to establish retrospective coherence. And as the source of every eventual selection in the writing of history, the archive is “the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it [the present] will have become the past” (Assmann 335). By itself archive cannot tell a story, but writers of history must always speak from what the archive contains.
With this relationship of the archive to history in mind, let us retreat somewhat from Assmann’s abstraction and return to the archive as an aggregation of papers, objects, and other tangible records. The archive is a source of information, a source with foundational and, arguably, unsurpassable significance for history, yet it is also an unmistakably physical thing. ‘The archive’ as a concept is divided in reality among countless repositories of materials, whether catalogued in the storage facilities of specialized archival institutions or packed haphazardly in the unlabeled boxes of anonymous attics. In this respect, the concept of the archive does not translate neatly from the theoretical to the concrete, since what is beautifully unified in the former is irreducibly messy in the latter. For the purposes of this paper, whose primary aim is not to define the archive but to explore a particular phenomenon of its materiality, ‘the archive’ refers to what are most often called ‘Archives,’ meaning a discrete collection of papers and (less commonly) other objects, stored in a centralized location and intentionally assembled around a specific and limited historical focus. In this definition, ‘the archive’ is a place to which one may go, a place perhaps open to the public or perhaps limited to those with certain academic or professional credentials, a place with a room in which one may (perhaps wearing the requisite cloth gloves to avoid spreading acidic skin oils) sit down with, and may read directly, the material products of the past—objects from another time. The informational content of the archive cannot be disregarded, but neither can we ignore the strange, further valence which the archive’s objects possess; interacting materially with the archive exceeds, in experiential weight, the mere gain of information.

To better grasp the origin of this extra-factual valence and its function within the system of the archive, the notion of fetishism is a useful conceptual tool. This paper traces the ideas of fetishism found in two separate theories: that of the 19th-century German economic and political theorist, Karl Marx; and that of the 20th-century French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss. These two analyses of fetishism, though distinct in their conclusions, complement each other when applied to the archive as a fetishized object, and it is the fetishistic qualities of the archive which, seen through the lenses of Marx and Lévi-Strauss, can explain the extra-factual experience that arises from material interaction with the archive.

2. FETISHISM: MARX

In Marxist theory, an object undergoes a strange transformation through becoming a commodity. When Marx introduces the idea of a commodity in the initial chapter of Capital, the term seems simple enough: “A commodity is, in the first place,
an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants” (303).
Commodities have an intrinsic ‘value’ derived from the quantity of human labor they embody (Marx 305), they have a ‘use-value’ derived from their utility (Marx 303), and they have an ‘exchange value’ derived from their interactions with other commodities (Marx 312). Commodities exist on these three levels of value, all of which depend on social relationships—the crystallization of human labor into value within the commodity, the application of its uses within the social realm, and the manifestation of its value relative to other commodities. Marx leaves no doubt as to the centrality of social relationships in the existence of commodities, writing that “the value of commodities has a purely social reality” (313). In other words, the various forms of value that distinguish a commodity from a mere object cannot exist outside the human realm of social use and interaction.

Yet Marx is not content with this definition of a commodity. Beyond all that he has written so far, beyond the comprehensible description of a commodity’s “value in use,” Marx introduces what he mysteriously calls the commodity’s “metaphysical subtleties” (319). In his initial explanation of what this vague attribution could mean, Marx writes of the process of turning wood into a table: “the table continues to be that common every-day thing, wood […] but so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent” (320). Though he does not give much elaboration in this brief passage, the table example makes the crucial clarification that the commodity’s ‘metaphysical subtleties’ are not directly related to either its physical composition or the labor that has been invested into it. Instead, the very act of attaching the name ‘commodity’ to the object seems somehow essential to the strange transformation Marx speaks of, imbuing the object with a quality independent of its use-value.

It is at this point that the notion of ‘commodity fetishism’ begins to emerge out of Marx's own impulse to explain why, for instance, the table as commodity signifies something greater than the table as merely an object in use. Marx concludes that when objects become commodities, “the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor” (320). This ‘presentation’ is the crux of the commodity’s strangeness; it encapsulates a compression of meaning in which the social relationships that exist between the producers of commodities come to be embodied in the relationships among those commodities. From the beginning, there is no doubt that both labor and its products have a distinctly social existence, but when the human relations among the laborers become associated with
the non-human relations of their products, and the producers themselves become
dissociated from their products, the interactions among the commodities take on
the weight of the human interactions behind them. As Marx writes, “There is a
physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities […]
a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form
of a relation between things” (321). His phrase ‘in their eyes’ hearkens back to his
initial point that the simple act of apprehending the table as a commodity is, in
some way, the impetus of transformation; the impression of the human observer is
instrumental in forming the commodity’s ‘metaphysical’ character.

Thus Marx finally arrives at a definition of ‘commodity fetishism,’ in which “the
products of men’s hands […] appear as independent beings endowed with life, and
entering into relation both with one another and the human race” (321). But Marx
does not develop this idea much further in Capital, leaving more recent scholarship
to elaborate on the specific power that objects derive from the fetishism Marx
describes. In particular, Arthur Ripstein’s explication of Marxist fetishism pushes
the role of human perception to the forefront, so that perception becomes a self-
fulfilling transformative force which acts unintentionally to remake the world in the
image of what it thinks is already the case. Ripstein argues that “the problem is not
that social relations between people seem to be relations between things, but that
in an important sense they are relations between things. The deep error involved
in taking commodities to have value in their own right comes not from the sense
in which it is false, but from the sense in which it is true” (739). For Ripstein, the
commodity, as something fundamentally inseparable from the necessarily human
context of its creation, has a non-illusory social power that is actively supported by
society’s acceptance of fetishism. If people, ignoring or not seeing the intermediary
leap that must occur from human to object, believe that commodities have social
agency, then this same belief will fulfill itself in the social role that commodities will
then inevitably assume.

3. FETISHISM: LÉVI-STRAUSS

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss also approaches fetishism, but with a
theoretical angle entirely distinct from the economics of Marx. In his 1962 work,
The Savage Mind, Lévi-Strauss uses the concepts of synchrony and diachrony to
explain the power of a particular fetish object, the churinga, which is found in the
Australian aboriginal society of the Aranda. The Aranda are what Lévi-Strauss calls
a ‘cold’ society, a society without history in the Western sense, whose conception
of time is divided between a mythic past of the ancestors and a continuous present of living people. In describing this temporal framework, so unlike the Western conception of a present constantly transforming into the past, Lévi-Strauss writes,

Mythical history thus presents the paradox of being both disjoined from and conjoined with the present. It is disjoined from it because the original ancestors were of a nature different from contemporary men: they were creators and these are imitators. It is conjoined with it because nothing has been going on since the appearance of the ancestors except events whose recurrence periodically effaces their particularity. (236)

It is the fetishism of the *churinga* that resolves this paradox of an unbreachable divide from the mythic past combined with an equally inviolable conviction that the present is homogenous with the past.

The *churinga*, usually made of carved wood or stone, “represents the physical body of a definite ancestor and generation after generation, it is formally conferred on the living person believed to be this ancestor’s reincarnation” (Lévi-Strauss 238). The physical connection to the ancestors that the *churinga* provides for its inheritors “furnishes the tangible proof that the ancestor and his living descendant are of one flesh” (Lévi-Strauss 241). Yet the cross-generational quality of this connection also inherently involves a temporal distance, and in the act of bridging this distance, the *churinga* embodies the simultaneously disjoined and conjoined relationship between present and mythic past. Thus, within an overwhelmingly synchronic society—that is, a society operating from the outlook of a continuous present, not recognizing the existence of historical change or development—the *churinga* acquires power as a fetish because it imports a salient element of diachrony, incorporating physically the recognition of a time distinct from the continuous present.

Of themselves, the *churinga* are not the source of this diachronic element, for it originates from the Aranda’s own idea of time, an idea which relies on the mythic past to define present life (Lévi-Strauss 242). But neither are the *churinga* ordinary hunks of wood or stone; even without all of the elaborate ritual care that is lavished upon them by the Aranda (Lévi-Strauss 238), they would still transcend their status as mere objects. This transcendence springs from the *churinga’s* ability to testify directly—physically—to the mythic past which otherwise could exist only in the imagination (Lévi-Strauss 242). The *churinga* do not prove the mythic past; that is not their function. Instead, they corporealize a knowledge of the past, conjuring
diachrony within the synchronic landscape of the present. The objects take on the power of fetish by becoming unmediated interfaces with a time which otherwise could only be experienced through abstraction and distance.

4. FETISHIZING THE ARCHIVE

In approaching the qualities of fetishism, Marx and Lévi-Strauss each reach their own explanations for the roots of fetishistic power, that is, the fetish’s transcendence of its status as mere object. Yet despite their distinct conclusions, the two theories are complementary rather than mutually exclusive in an analysis of the archive as fetish. Unlike Marx, Lévi-Strauss makes extended mention of the archive in his work, so it is convenient to begin with his theory on fetishism and the archive, using Marx afterward to extend the picture.

Lévi-Strauss directly compares the Aranda’s treatment of the fetishized churinga to our societal treatment of the archive. Just as “the churinga are hidden in piles in natural caves, far from frequented ways” (Lévi-Strauss 238), we keep our archival materials protected from decay and destruction by putting them in secure storage, safe from everyday wear-and-tear. And the ritualistic concern that attends every occasion when the churinga are “taken out to be inspected and handled” (Lévi-Strauss 238) is reminiscent of the ritual details that accompany our access to the archive: the antechamber where coats, bags, and other worldly articles must be left behind; the respectful silence of the reading room; the strict rules against food, drink, and the use of pens; the white cotton gloves; the humble request for a certain box of papers; the careful ferrying of materials from stacks to desk and back again by a trained officiant.

But the comparison goes deeper than this. Lévi-Strauss speaks directly to the distinction between the unfetishized archive-as-information and the fetishized extra-factual archive, using the churinga to explain the difference. In the same way that the churinga are not necessary to prove the existence of the mythic past, our archives are not needed to prove to us that the historical past existed. As Lévi-Strauss says, we need not “prove that all societies are in history and change: that this is so is patent” (234). What the churinga contribute is not a necessary proof of the past, it is a corporealization of that past, and “Similarly, our past would not disappear if we lost our archives: it would be deprived of what one is inclined to call its diachronic flavour. It would still exist as a past but preserved in nothing but contemporary or recent books, institutions, or even a situation. So it too would be
exhibited in synchrony” (Lévi-Strauss 242). The majority of information reaches us in ‘synchronic’ formats: if printed, it comes through books often new or almost new, even if they are reprints of much older works; if the information is digital, nearly every indication of ‘pastness’ has already been let go to facilitate vast improvements in ease of access. Were all our knowledge of history to be accessed solely through a computer, our rational awareness of the distinction between present and past would remain intact, but our sensation of the distinction would be utterly eroded. This sensation, what Lévi-Strauss calls ‘diachronic flavor,’ is what invests the archive with its extra-factual valence, explaining the crucial difference between reading digitized information on a computer screen and reading the same information in the author’s own handwriting. As the artifact ages, the ‘flavour’ grows stronger, so that a piece of contemporary correspondence will likely inspire less of a reaction, while a piece of ancient Egyptian papyrus is regarded as an awe-inspiring relic, independently of any value attributed to the information it contains.

Though our society, unlike the Aranda’s, is not built upon the notion of a continuous present, Lévi-Strauss is right to see a parallel, for outside of the archive our history has only a minimal direct presence in life. Lévi-Strauss encapsulates this eloquently when he writes that archives “give a physical existence to history, for in them alone is the contradiction of a completed past and a present in which it survives, surmounted. Archives are the embodied essence of the event” (242). Thus, the archive enables, in the present, an unmediated physical contact with the past; only there can the past be at once utterly distant and tangibly close. This is its fetishistic power.

Still, the understanding of the archive that can be gleaned from Lévi-Strauss is incomplete; for a fuller understanding of how the archive acts as a fetish, Marx is essential. There are, it should be observed, areas of overlap between the two theorists. For instance, Lévi-Strauss’s assertion that the fetishized archive is not primarily a source of historical fact—“As for events themselves, I have pointed out that they are attested otherwise than by the authentic documents, and generally better” (242)—is akin to Marx’s statement that “the mystical character of commodities does not originate, therefore, in their use-value” (320). Just as the fetishized papyrus is awe-inspiring whether or not it provides invaluable historical information about ancient Egypt, the transcendence of Marx’s hypothetically fetishized table is entirely unrelated to its suitability for use at mealtime. Yet despite overlap, the unique contribution of Marxist theory is to explain the archive as an inherently social object.

The application of Marxist commodity fetishism to the archive is neither as simple
nor as direct as the application of Lévi-Strauss, for Marx makes no mention of the archive in his exposition of commodity fetishism, and his fetishized objects, unlike the aboriginal fetishes explored by Lévi-Strauss, are neither innately historical nor easily analogous to the archive. It is immediately evident, especially once Lévi-Strauss draws the connection on the reader’s behalf, that the *churinga* is remarkably similar to the archive, so that the two lend themselves well to parallel conclusions regarding fetishism. But the only object Marx speaks of, his wooden table, is by no means a clear analog to the archive, and for the majority of his explanation of commodity fetishism Marx speaks only in the abstract, of ‘the commodity,’ of ‘the product of labour,’ or simply of ‘things.’ Within the bounds of his theory, Marx provides no guidance for how the archive could be connected to the framework of commodities.

Yet despite this hurdle, it is possible to make the connection, if only one begins with some foundational conception of the archive that, however, must come from a source outside of Marx. This conception we can extract from Lévi-Strauss, who reminds his reader that “we might say of archives that they are after all only pieces of paper. They need only all have been published, for our knowledge and condition to be totally unaffected were a cataclysm to destroy the originals. We should, however, feel this loss as an irreparable injury that strikes to the core of our being” (241-242).

Here, Lévi-Strauss corroborates the basic conviction that the archive possesses a significant extra-factual valence, whose natural analog in Marx is the “metaphysical subtlety” of commodities (Marx 319). With this conviction as a starting point, the voice of Marx can enter the conversation.

The ‘metaphysical subtlety,’ later crystallized as “the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities,” (Marx 321) was explained earlier in this paper as a compression of social relationships into object relationships. The interactions between people in society, already recognizable in the relationships between the objects they produce, become entirely subsumed into the objects’ interactions. For instance, the interaction between the baker and the buyer of bread is evident in their exchange of bread and money, but in a fetishistic understanding, the exchange of bread and money no longer signifies the relationship of baker and customer but actually contains that relationship, independently of the people themselves. A comparable fetishistic compression appears, likewise, in the archive. The objects which people in the past have produced—not in the Marxist sense, but certainly in the simple sense that the objects were made, the papers written, by human hands—are assembled in the archive for examination long after their
producers’ deaths, in order to facilitate the reconstruction of the social relationships that existed between those people. This reconstruction, which we call the writing of history, relies unquestionably on the compression of human social relationships into object relationships; once the human relationships have disappeared from the earth and the objects are all that remain, crafting a selective narrative about those human relationships requires an implicit acknowledgment that any relationship among the objects will reflect a corresponding human relationship, and thus an acknowledgment that the social relationships are embodied in the objects.

Also critical is the question of perception’s role. Some interpreters of Marx have concluded from his explanation of commodity fetishism that “labor in this sense can be seen as embodied in the form of the object only in the mind’s eye as a fetishistic construct because no sociological abstraction can be embodied in a material object in any realistic sense,” and in their interpretation, “Marx’s formulation is a metaphorical statement about the fetishistic nature of value which at the same time points to its sociological basis. Like all metaphorical statements it has limited usefulness” [italics mine] (Lewin & Morris 185). In this reading, fetishism is never more than an illusion, and the object can never actually be what, as a fetish, it appears to be. This reading is opposed, however, by the stronger interpretation of Ripstein, for whom commodity fetishism, if taken only in the sense of an illusion ‘in the mind’s eye,’ presents “a relatively shallow and uninteresting problem” (738). Without ignoring the metaphorical origins of commodity fetishism—i.e., the compression which transfers human social meaning onto objects—Ripstein regards this metaphor as the beginning, rather than the end, of the fetishism process. His argument that “commodity fetishism is a condition that transcends individual consciousness of it” (Ripstein 739) presents the fetish, in its fully realized state, as a potent social construction which, though it may begin with belief, ends as a condition of reality. The fetishism does not disappear when one becomes aware of its origins, because the fetish is not confined to the individual mind; it has an autonomous, external existence in society.

When applied to the archive, this strong reading of Marx suggests that the social weight borne by archival objects is more than just a correspondence between the object relations preserved in the archive and the extinct human relations that produced them. To halt the archive fetishism argument at an assertion of ‘correspondence’ is analogous to the limited reading of commodity fetishism as a metaphor. But Marx, in conjunction with Ripstein, can radically deepen our understanding of Lévi-Strauss’s statement that “archives are the embodied essence
of the event” (242). Weaker readings would suggest that this ‘embodied essence’ refers to a species of representation, but it is possible to go further with this ‘essence,’ exceeding Lévi-Strauss’s own idea of ‘diachronic flavour.’ Indeed, it is possible to say that, because of the real transformation involved in fetishistic compression, the objects of the archive come to comprise the event itself, even in the absence of those people, perhaps long dead, who originally enacted the event. This is not ‘diachronic flavour’: it is the fully anachronistic, physical presence of the completed past—of history—in the present. In this reading, built from the fetishism theory of Marx, the archive is not a representation of history; the archive is history.

5. FROM AN ARCHIVIST: APPLICATIONS

So the archive appears conclusively and comprehensibly as a fetish, courtesy of Marx and Lévi-Strauss. What remains to be seen is if this theory can translate successfully from the abstract to the concrete, for theoretical claims about the archive are of limited interest if they cannot further our understanding of the place that the archive occupies in our society and the way in which we actually interact with archival objects.

Nicholas Siekierski is an archivist at the Hoover Institution at Stanford. He was interviewed in May of 2012 to provide an archivist’s perspective on the questions discussed in this paper, in order to ascertain the extent of congruence between a theoretical view of ‘archive fetishism’ and the actual view archivists take of their own work. This entire project would be undercut without a basic agreement on the existence, if not the exact nature, of the extra-factual valence of the archive that was posited from the outset. Fortunately, Siekierski put forth a similar premise; in his words, “there is also that additional sense, beyond this just being information on a page.” From this starting point, in agreement that the power of the archive is not limited to its informational content, it only remains to understand how that extra valence acts, and how it can be explained.

The archive, as described by Siekierski, fills quite naturally the role that Lévi-Strauss expects of it. Lévi-Strauss’s ‘diachronic flavour,’ which suggests that the archive is a manifestation of the completed past with a character distinctly separate from its synchronic surroundings, is exactly what appears in Siekierski’s statement that “the collections are like time capsules, you can say. And if anything, it brings that piece of time, that piece of history that was that person’s reality, into a modern context.” Both men recognize that the archive is a place of the past within the temporal present—
what Assmann calls the preservation of “the past as past” (335). In addition, when Siekierski was asked about the relative salience of digital information and archival objects, he argued that “being able to hold that material imparts an experience that is not reproducible through a means that separates you from the physical object…To look at the materials, to recognize that this was created by a person at this point in history—you are losing that piece of tactile information when you separate it from the physical form.” Siekierski’s idea of ‘tactile information’ entirely independent of factual information aligns eloquently with the concept, again found in Lévi-Strauss, that the fetish enables an unmediated physical contact with the past. Yet Siekierski also introduces the ‘recognition of creation,’ a further proposition about fetishism that rests on an object’s ability to prompt the viewer to recognize that it was created, in the past, by a person.

At this point, the theory derived from Marx becomes useful for explaining how fetishism incongruously imbues a particular object with such an apparently social quality as the ‘recognition of creation.’ After all, most objects do not share this quality; the myriad goods that line store shelves, for instance, do not often inspire one to imagine the circumstances of their production. But a Marxist understanding of fetishism tells us that the inherently social nature of the way something is produced—whether that something be a table or a personal letter—can become compressed into the thing itself, so that objects become invested with social meaning.

Siekierski provided several illustrative examples which demonstrate, with varying degrees of obviousness, what this compressive investment looks like. Perhaps the most pronounced example is the following:

One of the items is a helmet, a rusted, World War I era helmet that has an obvious bullet hole in the back, so you can see where the metal went in. Other parts are rusted, but you can see that that was a bullet hole. You just imagine that this was some guy who was probably not much older than his early twenties, maybe late teens, [for whom] that was his reality. He was sent to war, he maybe had not necessarily wanted to be there, and that’s how his young life ended. (Siekierski)

In this case, the arresting violence of the event—a fatal gunshot to the head—and its unmistakable, uncomplicated imprint on the object—a bullet hole in the helmet—cannot but compel the imagination to envision the circumstances. The graphic force commanded by the object makes it seem almost flippant to speak of ‘social meaning’
here, yet here it is easiest to detect how that composite of past social relationships, which we call ‘history,’ can exist convincingly as an object.

If not quite so poignant as the helmet which holds within it the moment of death, another of Siekierski’s examples demonstrates a similar embodiment of circumstances in object. In this case, the object is “the diary of Lin Zhao; she was a communist in China who eventually started speaking out against the communist regime, and she was imprisoned. While in prison, all her writing utensils were taken away [...] so she ended up using her own blood to write this diary of her experiences” (Siekierski). It is difficult not to have a visceral reaction to this startling fact, and difficult not to speculate, perhaps in a wave of queasiness, just how Lin managed to extract and use her blood, and with what extraordinary self-discipline she must have done so. The material evidence of these circumstances may be more ambiguous than the bullet hole in the helmet, for the blood handwritten onto the page is not as straightforward a manifestation of the event, but the social power that the object holds for its viewer is incontestable.

And finally, a third example given by Siekierski—an example with an emotional valence less immediately obvious than the two preceding objects, but all the more illustrative because of that—is a collection of anti-Soviet propaganda clandestinely produced by the Polish underground during World War II. As Siekierski described these papers, it became apparent that the circumstances surrounding them, and not the historical information they contain, are their most fascinating aspect:

Just to think that they were in some village, in some dark room, and they were hand typing these little leaflets that could potentially lead to them being arrested and horribly tortured and killed, as many of them were, but they still felt strongly enough about it, and wanted to resist this tyranny that was encroaching upon them, that they were willing to risk their lives to produce these little newsletters or pamphlets to inform their fellow citizens. (Siekierski)

This particular anecdote is the most nuanced of the three. Unlike the helmet, these Polish papers cannot be reduced to a simple and decisive act concentrated around a single person, and, being typed, the papers cannot match the bodily essence of the handwriting in the Lin blood letters. Yet still, as Siekierski’s narration shows, the presence of these papers stirs the imagination to an equally vivid portrait of the circumstances of their production. It is not fatuous to wonder why this should be so: why should this particular typewritten pamphlet have the power to be the
history that created it, the power to contain and not merely represent something innately social, a past event? To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, ‘that this is so is patent’—Siekierski confirms what intuition already acknowledges, that the imagination guides the intellect to see, within the archival object, history itself. But as for why the archival object has this power, while something like the dining room table does not, Ripstein’s reading of Marx may provide a clue.

The reader will recall that the usefulness of Ripstein arises from a consideration of the perceptual origin of the fetish. The table, as Marx describes it, transcends its own materiality “so soon as it steps forth as a commodity” (320), a shift which lays great emphasis on the human act of perceiving the table to be a ‘commodity,’ and of naming it as such. Analogously, perceiving something to be an ‘archival’ object is perhaps the origin of the archive-fetish; somehow, this apprehending itself affects the shift from ordinary thing to fetish object. And if, like fetishism of commodities, fetishism of the archive begins in this perceptual compression of meaning, it may likewise end as a self-realizing construction of reality. The archive evolves from our acceptance that its objects are in some way an embodiment of history, until the social weight of the history that we look for there is entirely subsumed by the archive. What results is a place where objects become history simply by virtue of their entrance into it. Thus, the archive-fetish is born.

And so we have come full-circle: perception creates the perceived, and the system is closed. If this is true, then Marx’s ‘metaphysical subtlety’ assumes the form of a complex perceptual loop, yet at no point does this loop pass outside of the metaphysical. Which is to say, the fetishized archive is quite real, but only insofar as we make it so. Perhaps, upon some reflection, this is no surprise, but it raises the question of authenticity. If the archive-fetish is a product of the perceiver and not the perceived, one object might well be substituted for another with no change in the effect. Lévi-Strauss provides a simple, if unsatisfying, answer to this question: “the main thing is not that the bed is the self-same one on which it is proved Van Gogh slept: all the visitor asks is to be shown it” (244). This, too, should not surprise—a fake is as real as the real thing, if only it is believed to be so. But this misses the point. If history exists as the object because of a perceptual feedback loop, what we were reading was never the object, it was the history. To lament that the object’s authenticity quickly becomes irrelevant to this process is to forget that the object was always, in the extra-factual interaction, merely a proxy. The conjured history belongs not to the object, but to us.
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What plays a larger role in decision-making: logic or instinct? In Plato’s *Republic*, it would seem that reason prevails above all, but in a very novel insight, Eric Eichelberger considers the persuasiveness and dominion of instinct in the Platonic project. By analyzing the unique topic of guardian sexuality, Eric argues for the potentially disruptive and certainly innate force of “erotic necessity.” Argued as both a social and behavioral disturbance, sexuality confronts Plato’s compartmentalized system of the city and, by analogy, the soul. How does the Platonic enterprise naturalize sexuality as it does both the classes and the elements of the soul? What options are available to Plato to ward against sexuality’s rupturing of a self-sustaining system of justice? What might the mechanisms of social control, such as festivals, hymns, and sacrifices actually serve? The bold thesis that “Justice is thus the process of imposing logical discipline upon biological disruption” makes claims about the disciplinary process that rituals hold as the primary mode of repressing the spontaneity of sexuality. Eric reasons in the case of sex among the guardian class that physical instinct poses a unique threat to the polis and just might eventually decay the reign of reason by exposing the sterility of “geometric necessity.” However, as Eric’s experimental thesis about sex in the polis translates into an argument regarding the soul, he approaches his most refined discovery about the dialectic between body and soul and what it may mean for the identity of an individual in leading a more virtuous life.

—Nicole Stengel
Disruption and Discipline: Biology, Sexuality, and Ritual in Plato’s Republic

Eric Eichelberger

 Plato’s Republic concerns itself with systems. Both the city and the soul that he analyses are logical, ordered, and harmonious. Both systems have three parts; the city’s guardian, auxiliary, and producer classes correspond tidily with the soul’s rational, spirited, and appetitive elements. Both systems rely on ostensibly natural, self-sustaining discipline, enforced through strict divisions. These divisions, between classes and elements, are presented as inborn, and this innateness is pivotal to Plato’s argument that the division of labor achieves justice. Within such a disciplined and logical system, sexuality troubles the divisions between apparently innate categories and disrupts the process of order. It is through ritual that the systems can suppress this disruption in order to create the necessary divisions that can achieve justice. Justice is thus the process of imposing logical discipline upon biological disruption.

Sexuality disturbs the polis’ social and behavioral systems. Discussing interactions between guardian men and women, Socrates and Glaucon posit:

S: …because […] they will live together; and through mixing in the gymnasia and in the rest of their daily life, they will be driven by inborn compulsion, I take it, to have sex with one another. Or don’t you think I am talking about necessities here?

G: Not geometric necessities, certainly, but erotic ones; and they probably have a sharper capacity to persuade and attract most people.

S: They do, indeed. But […] for them to have unregulated sexual intercourse
[...] would not be a pious thing [...] and the rulers won't allow it. (Rep. 5.458c8-e1)

That erotic necessities are more persuasive than geometric ones indicates that sexual impulse overpowers logical abstraction. Geometry represents the sterile realm of theoretical, perfect shapes. Sexual urge, a compulsion that arises between those near each other, is quite different: a world where chance proximity can have dire consequences. Geometry finds its motivation in principle and reason, whereas sexuality finds its motivation in chance and impulse. This difference suggests that physical instinct, even within the guardians, plays a larger role than logic in the decision-making process. The guardians’ social position relies on an innate strength for the logical, a strength that years of education hone into a principled rationality. Yet if even after so much education, guardians’ logic cannot regulate their own appetites, then their status as distinct from the producers is precarious. Regarding sexuality, the two appear the same. This similarity reflects impurities within classes; sexual instincts disrupt seemingly innate class distinctions. This disruption does not represent a malfunctioning within the polis but instead an inevitable and common event. Sexuality disrupts the polis’ system but is also an inborn part of that system.

Within the polis, other disruptions exist, but guardian sexuality is especially troublesome. If as a result of sex the guardians—the best citizens—fell to impiety, the polis as a whole would be less pious. If guardians reproduced with whomever they please, the resulting offspring might weaken the population as a whole. If guardians form attachments to mates of their own choosing, the resulting family units might weaken each individual’s link to the polis and to their civic duty. If guardians procreated, this creation of life would give them power to create life outside of the polis’ regulations, needs, and expectations, and the nature of their offspring would be entirely unpredictable. Sexuality is a unique danger among threats presented to the polis because it has these distinct capacities to encourage impiety, to create life, to form attachments, and to weaken the population. The results of these capacities are also unpredictable, because of sexuality’s randomness. Sex thus has a special status as a physical force more persuasive than and disruptive of logic. The disruptive power of sexuality is a physical urge and an unpredictable force, a unique possibility among Plato’s fears for the polis’ decay, and it requires special suppression.

Disciplinary tactics developed within the polis to eliminate the pollution of sexuality function through rituals. Socrates describes these tactics as a set of rituals and events:
It follows [...] that the best men should mate with the best women in as many cases as possible [...] So then, we will have to establish by law certain festivals and sacrifices at which we will bring together brides and bridegrooms, and our poets must compose suitable hymns for the marriages that take place. [...] I imagine that some sophisticated lotteries will have to be created, then, so that an inferior person of that sort will blame chance rather than the rulers at each mating time. (Rep. 5.459c8-460a10)

Here Socrates suggests that the city police procreation by pairing up guardians based on their worth. By serving the needs of the polis, this regulatory process places sex under logic’s control: it disciplines sexuality and makes it palatable to society. It relies still on erotic necessities by assuming that guardians would sleep with their assigned mate but fulfills geometric necessities in the form of the theoretical needs of the whole. As this kind of sex no longer leads to impiety, this rite brings sexuality into Plato’s ideal of justice. Festivals, hymns, and sacrifices hide the choices and intentions of the rulers. They are also educational, in teaching citizens only to have sex with state approval. This education is an act of discipline in that it limits people’s behavior. Rituals mask this element of the process, by making it seem less regulatory or intentional than traditional and patriotic. Reproductive lotteries would recreate an illusory system of chance to pair up guardians. This imitation of chance mimics the influence that, as explored earlier, chance and proximity have on sexuality. This discipline acts subtly; it hides its design and designers from the view of a public who perceive it as custom, not as regulation. It manages the disruption of sexuality by channeling the motives and methods of that disruption towards justice and control.

These ritualistic methods of discipline would create certain results: better generations of guardians and divisions between social classes. If, for Plato, a just city is one in which a division of labor lets each citizen perform the task at which he or she is most competent, then the “best men” and “best women” that the polis’ rulers pair up would presumably be the best guardians. Since these best guardians would be those best suited to guardianship, the most guardian-like, each generation would be more and more guardian-like. The rituals that Socrates recommends would exert a stronger influence on each generation, as well, since their cultural practice would be longer established. As the disciplinary function of these rituals strengthened, the urge to have sex with unapproved partners would diminish, and the hold of logic over guardian behavior would thus grow stronger—making them more guardian-like. This diminution of appetite would define the aforementioned line between
guardians and other classes. It is ritual, then, that would create the solid class boundaries on which the polis’ justice relies.

Looking through the double lens of city and soul, it is essential next to consider what this analysis of ritual and social division can illuminate about Plato’s elements of the soul. Socrates concludes that “the same classes as are in the city are in the soul of each individual, and an equal number of them too” (Rep. 4.441c5-6). This analogy compares guardians with the rational element, auxiliaries with the spirited element, and producers with the appetitive element (Rep. 4.440e10-441a4). The guardians’ sex drive, translated to the soul, implies that sexual impulse can compel the rational element of one’s soul to pursue illogical, impious action. As within the city, this disruption troubles one of the foundations of Plato’s arguments: the clear division of the soul into three parts. If reason contains appetite, then the rational element’s position as a unique and supreme entity within the soul falls into question. This instability reflects a natural impure state, then, of the soul: without education, reason still contains some appetite. This impurity reflects that Plato’s categories are not innate, as presented, but instead constructed.

Extending the analogy, the soul must, like the city, use discipline in order to subdue the threat of sexuality. With the guardians, the process informed and regulated how they would procreate. Placing this process within the soul, the closest equivalent to individuals of the city is perhaps a group of specific reinforced urges within each element. That process of ritual that regulated procreation so as to only create the best citizens would compare to a process of personal rituals in which an individual would condition him or herself to pursue more virtuous instincts. Self-control that imposes these reasoned rituals upon biological urges is paramount to maintain such a process of self-alteration. As with the citizens, this process purifies each element and thus creates the actual divisions between the elements; by overcoming physical urges, it defines the boundaries and capacities of its rational element. This differentiation between parts is critical to allowing each part to perform its task, which is Plato’s definition of justice.

This process suggests a less precise method of reaching justice within the individual. Reason is not innately all-powerful but instead one force among many that operate on a body. Thus the reason’s discipline is continually in dialogue with a disruptive appetite. Here the appetite emerges from the body, not the soul, though Plato barely mentions the individual body at all, and biological realities present an eternal threat to constructed methods of attaining justice, which rely on ritual and self-
control. Strengthening this self-control can limit the power of biology to disrupt one's systems, but the danger of decay remains. Forces may fall out of sync, the soul can overcorrect, the soul might return to harmony, and the entire system must learn which parts to keep and which to prune. Justice, then, is less an achieved state than a continuing process of disciplining disruption through which the soul can find a balance with the body.

Applying Plato's treatment of guardian sexuality to his idea of the soul casts his justice as a process of disciplining the body and eliminating its disruptions. This process of discipline uses ritual to condition the behavior of bodies—in or outside the polis. Such changes mute the biological threat of sexuality, using ritual to render it incapable of disrupting order, and in doing so, changes the very identity of an individual. These rituals, and the systems of disruption and discipline that they inhabit, are crucial to Plato's Republic, as is their connection to justice. The bodies that these rituals regulate make up a rarely mentioned yet frequently disruptive presence within the text, which, through this interpretation, becomes less a descriptive worldview than a recommendation for the construction of processes to alter biological realities.
Luke Babich's essay examines two relatively short passages from Dante's *Divine Comedy*—the description of the stairs to Purgatory in Purgatorio 9, and the presentation of Satan in Inferno 34—and uses this examination to advance several astonishingly insightful claims about the overall meaning and structure of the *Comedy*. Luke's primary argument is that the stairs of Purgatorio 9 are emblematic of the overall journey of the pilgrim as he evolves from possessing only the capacity for (reflexive) self-love, to being capable of loving God and humanity reflectively, that is, as God himself loves. But the essay also shows how the three stages of this journey, embodied in the three steps of the stairs, are prefigured in three aspects of Satan as we encounter him at the end of Inferno. This is significant because it helps us understand what is wrong with the pilgrim: Satan’s real sin—self-love—is also the pilgrim’s sin. His journey past Satan is also a journey through Satan, and accordingly his redemption cannot be a simple rejection or overcoming of his sin, but rather a transformation of self-love into a different, more expansive kind of love.

A final, fascinating insight of Luke's paper comes in its penultimate paragraph and its conclusion, which argues that individual passages in the *Comedy* only function properly when they are reflectively relational, just as individual humans are intended to function in God’s overall design. Luke's own readings of individual passages—in particular, the two he offers here—must reflect outwards towards the text as a whole, and can only be understood fully by seeing this reflective aspect. This is a deep insight that relates Dante’s vision of sin and redemption to his conception of the work of art, and shows that they must have a similar structure. Cleverly, Luke's conclusion at once undercuts the significance of isolated close analyses, while foregrounding the function of his own analyses as relational elements of a totality. For an essay that is ostensibly limited in its scope to close reading, this is an impressive accomplishment.

—Jeremy Sabol
Dante’s depiction of the pilgrim’s journey from hell to heaven symbolizes the spiritual journey from sin to redemption. The stairs to Purgatory spatially arrange the steps of this conceptual pilgrimage. The pilgrim attains redemption by loving God, but is limited by his exclusive capacity for self-love. The stairs systematize three expansions of self-recognition that transfer love of the self onto external ‘mirrors’ of the pilgrim. The strictly reflexive love is transformed into a reflective love that encompasses first another individual, then humanity as a whole, and then God himself through self-recognition in Christ. Dante codifies a system in which an individual capable only of self-love may come to love God and be redeemed. The literary structure of the Comedy itself follows the same journey from reflexive love to redemptive, reflective love of God.

The three stairs to Purgatory mark the transition from the pilgrim’s encounter with Satan to the Gates of Purgatory and the promise of redemption that lies beyond.

There we came; and the first step was white marble, so polished and shining that I was mirrored in it just as I appear. The second was darker than purple, made of a rough dry stone, cracked both lengthwise and across. The third,
which weighs the others down, seemed of porphyry to me, as flaming as
blood spurting from a vein. (Purg. 9.94-102)

These three stairs are an inverted correspondence to the trinity of canticas in Dante’s
_Comedy_; The white a symbol for Paradiso and its reflective properties evocative of
the Pilgrim’s climactic reflection of his own human image in God (Par. 33.137);
The black/dark purple an allusion to Purgatorio and the cross shape upon it to the
Christ-like suffering for redemption that occurs in the second cantica; the red to
Inferno and the fiery judgment that takes place in Hell. Satan’s red face is foremost
in Hell (Inf. 34.38-9), just as Inferno is first in the _Comedy_ and the red stair is
first in the order of descending weight (Purg. 9.100). Thus, the stairs are a spatial
metaphor for the pilgrim’s journey through the _Comedy_, from hell to heaven: from
sin to redemption.

Exploration of the stairs inevitably leads through Satan, just as does the pilgrim’s
journey. Satan’s role in the final canto of Inferno elucidates the qualities of the
steps leading up to Purgatory proper. The colors of Satan’s faces and the explicit
comparison of Satan to a staircase (Inf. 34.38-45 and 34.82, respectively) anticipate
the stairs. The passage with the steps appears in Canto 9 of Purgatory placing it in
the 43rd Canto of the _Comedy_ as a whole. Satan appears in Canto 34, making the
two Cantos numerological reflections of one another.1 Satan is inextricably related
to the steps.

The same sin that conducted Satan to his predicament weighs upon the stairs.
Porphyry [Italian, _porfido_], the substance of the third stair, contains a pun on
perfidious, or fraudulent (Italian, _perfido_). This pun evokes Satan’s sin, since Satan
himself resides at the center of the circle of the fraudulent. The ‘fraudulent’ top stair
“weighs the others down”, applying the implication of sin to the entire staircase.
However, the emphasis of this sin in the final step on the path to redemption suggests
that Satan’s characteristic sin is not escaped by this journey, but rather brought to a
‘higher’ state. The metaphorical weight of this sin conveys the sin’s ubiquity. Satan
exists at “the point toward which the weights all move from every direction” (Inf.
34.110-1), characterizing this sin as an inescapable and universal trait. The presence
of the sin does not change as the pilgrim ascends the stairs; only his individual
relationship to that sin changes with each advancement.

1 The coupling of threes and fours (naturally creating a sum of seven) is present throughout the
_Divine Comedy_— c.f. Four circles/Three crosses Par 1.37--39; Four stars/Three stars Purg 1.25--27
and 8.91--93; also a reference to the Four Cardinal Virtues and the Three Theological Virtues.
Satan's contrapasso reveals that self-love is the natural and ubiquitous sin weighing upon the steps. The prevalence of eating in Satan's contrapasso (c.f. Inf. 34.55-7) classifies his sin as a self-love that is best described as reflexive. Satan's gnashing teeth recall the sinner who immediately preceded him: Ugolino, who devoured his own children during prolonged captivity (Inf. 33.75-78). The deeply ironic use of progeny as sustenance is a visceral physical representation of Satan's reflexive love: The creation is consumed and turned back on the creator in order to perpetuate the individual. Thus, Satan's sin is reflexive love, and this reflexive love seeks to perpetuate the individual's identity. The stairs, therefore, also have sinful self-love in their nature. However, this sinful substance is shaped into stairs, an edifice that supports the pilgrim's ascent to redemption. Self-love becomes the very mechanism by which the pilgrim achieves redemption.

The white step represents the first advancement towards redemption; the transformation of reflexive love into reflective love. In this step, the pilgrim was “mirrored in it just as I appear” (Purg. 9.95-6). This mirror relationship closely parallels the sinful state of reflexive love. The pilgrim assumes the roles of both author and witness—creator and consumer—of his own image. In his reflection, he is also witnessing this very process: recognizing his own reflexive love. Reflective love, therefore, is still love of the self, merely transferred to an external figure in whom the pilgrim recognizes himself. However, this process of transference fundamentally alters the natural self-love.

Satan's white face, corresponding to the white step, indicates that reflective love contextualizes reflexive love. The description of the physical form in the mouth of the white face should be interpreted as a moment of reflection parallel to the pilgrim's recognition of his form in the white step. Cassius, along with Brutus, is transfixed in Satan's jaws with his head facing the pilgrim2 (c.f. Inf. 34.64); this spatially represents the mirror relationship between the sinner and the pilgrim, since the pilgrim is similarly made “frozen and feeble” (Inf. 34.22) by Satan but stares back at Cassius' suspended face. The moment becomes one in which the pilgrim recognizes himself in Cassius. The principle of natural self-love also applies to this reflected image. The pilgrim loves Cassius literally as himself, implying a deep empathy felt for the sinner.

The scene characterizes Cassius as “powerfully built” (Inf. 34.67-8). This detail is profoundly ironic in the context of his predicament. Human strength is rendered

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2 The head is explicitly established as a mechanism for identification and recognition as early as Inf. 12.121-3
utterly infinitesimal when placed in Satan’s enormous maw. This moment of reflection contextualizes the pilgrim’s reflexive love, embodied by Cassius: any kind of mortal power is insignificant in the face of divine judgment. The transition to reflective love reveals to the pilgrim his own insignificance as an individual. The moment in which the pilgrim sees Cassius, and the symbolic “first step” on the path to redemption, thus becomes a moment of humbling reflective self-love, driven by the recognition of the self in an external other.3

The second stair represents a further expansive contextualization. Reflective love leads to the destruction of boundaries between the individual and humanity. The reference to the purple color and its cracked surface (Purg. 9.97-9) recall classical descriptions of the tearing of the purple temple veil (c.f. Exodus 26:31 and Matthew 27:51). The temple veil represented restricted access to God’s earthly presence: Only a single high priest was allowed to enter the cloistered sanctuary (Hebrews 9:7), until the veil was ruptured by the death of Christ. God’s earthly presence, evocative of the temporal Godliness the reflexive pilgrim desires, represents the natural state of reflexive love. The tearing of the veil for Christ stands for reflective love: Christ, God in human form, ‘mirrors’ God’s earthly presence behind the veil. This mirror relationship splits the veil, allowing God’s presence to escape the temple and dwell with all people. Thus, the transference of reflexive love onto one external likeness leads to the transference of this love onto all of humanity. The self-directed nature of this love remains unchanged, but the boundaries within which the self is perceived expand. The pilgrim’s reflective love in the first step leads him to recognize himself in—and so reflectively love—humanity at large.

Satan’s dark face characterizes this expanded self-reflection—represented by the darkest step—as a conscious sacrifice of the reflexive desire for self-perpetuation. The description of Satan’s dark face characterizes the advancement away from reflexive love towards redemption symbolized by the dark step. This relationship reveals that the reflective love for the society with which the pilgrim identifies is greater than the purely reflexive love turned directly back on the pilgrim himself. Brutus, the sinner in the “black muzzle”, “is convulsed, but does not say a word” (Inf. 34.64-66). This description implies that his silence is maintained consciously and despite

3 The crimes of the sinners in Satan’s mouths represent the failure to make the advancement towards redemption symbolized by their respective stair. Dante depicts Cassius’ motives as purely reflexive. Cassius failed to make even the first step, to recognize himself in or empathize with his victim, Julius Caesar.
his torment, that Brutus’ ‘convulsions’ ought to be provoking verbal outcry. On the other hand, Satan is silenced naturally by the act of gnawing Brutus. Satan’s silence is a condition of his punishment, but Brutus is actively electing to join Satan in this silence. This active decision to unify with the larger figure parallels the pilgrim’s recognition of himself as part of a larger human society, represented by the second step. This parallel reveals that the reflective love of humanity is, for the pilgrim, an active decision to resist the pilgrim’s own natural, instinctive tendencies—that is, the reflexive desire for self-perpetuation—to unify himself with humanity. This expanded love of humanity is, therefore, characterized as a sacrifice of reflexive tendencies to pursue unity with a greater “self”: the humanity in which the pilgrim self-recognizes. This theme of sacrifice is affirmed by the cross-shaped cracks on the step, an allusion to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross that constituted a parallel death to sin.

The third stair concludes the journey to redemption: the final step in this journey is the love of God, accomplished through recognition of the self in Christ. Dante resolves the conflict between the human capacity for self-love and the love of God as a requisite for redemption: the third stair characterizes the pilgrim’s love for Christ as both the reflective love of another human being and the love of God. The imagery of the third stair evokes two descriptions of redemption, one from Dante’s own Comedy and the other from scripture. Drawing from the Comedy itself, the “flaming” color of the stair anticipates the pilgrim’s passage through fire in the final terrace of Purgatory, which concludes the pilgrim’s purgation of sin and gains him entrance into Heaven (Purg. 27.7-60). However, in this scene the pilgrim cannot be persuaded by any rational argument to step into the cleansing flame; it is only the reminder that “between Beatrice and you is this wall” (Purg. 27.35-6) that spurs the pilgrim to complete his journey of redemption.

Thus, it is not a divine love that completes Dante’s tripartite path to redemption, but rather a fully human one—in the context of this examination, reflective self-love. The justification for this reflective love as the only power required to lead an individual to redemption is given by the second textual evocation, this one to the redeeming power of Christ. The comparison of the final stair to “blood spurting

4 The dichotomous relationship between consumption and communication in Inferno is established by Cerberus (c.f. Inf. 6.28-33), continued by Ugolino and Ruggieri (c.f. Inferno 33.76-8), and concludes here with Satan.

5 Brutus’ sin represents a failure to translate his reflective love of an external individual to his human society as a whole. Brutus empathized with Caesar, but failed to relate to his society as a whole.
from a vein” (Purg. 9.100-2) is evocative of “the blood of Christ” through which Christians are redeemed (cf. 1 Peter 1:19). The pilgrim’s expansive reflective love of humanity, represented by the previous step, encompasses Christ: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he shared in their humanity” (Hebrews 2:14). The pilgrim is able to self-recognize and so reflectively love in Christ because of Christ’s humanity, but loving Christ is also loving God because of his status as “God in human flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). This love of God redeems the pilgrim even though it is still self-love; the conclusion does not redefine the fundamental nature of the pilgrim’s love, but rather the pilgrim is able to recognize himself in God, and reflectively love God, through Christ.

The redemption of the third step reflects the punishment of Judas, consumed by Satan’s red face. Judas’ position is reversed relative to the other sinners: “his head inside, waving his legs outside” (Inf. 34.63). The substitution of the sinner’s legs for his head corresponds to a redefined moment of self-recognition for the pilgrim. The head, by which Cassius and Brutus could be easily identified, is obscured in the case of Judas; this constitutes an erasure of individual identity. Judas is identified by his suffering (Inf. 34.61-62) and his “waving…legs”. He is recognized by his struggle, rather than his features. This struggle is the struggle for redemption. The pilgrim’s self-recognition in Judas’ legs is the recognition of a shared journey towards redemption, regardless of the individual identity of the sinner. The connection between Judas’ contrapasso and redemption—established by the connection between the red stair and Satan’s red face—defines the redemptive step as one in which the pilgrim becomes defined by his journey rather than his identity. In this substitution of the universal struggle towards God for the individual identity, there is redemption.6

The structure of Dante’s *Comedy* follows the ascent from sin to redemption depicted by the stairs. The creation of the *Comedy* is inherently motivated by reflexive love. The pilgrim describes art as the device by which “Man makes himself eternal” (Inf. 15.85-6). A work of art serves to perpetuate the author’s identity beyond his death. The author’s creative immortality closely parallels the reflexive consumption in Satan’s contrapasso: both constitute the same act of creation being used to sustain the creator’s identity.

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6 Judas was able to relate to his human society, but not to God. He recognized Christ’s humanity, but not his divinity. For Dante, this crime deserves “greatest punishment (Inf. 34.61-2). He quantifies the magnitude of the sin according to how close the sinner came to attaining redemption, rather than by the depth of their reflexive love.
The reflective quality of the Comedy undermines the authority of a single passage’s ideas. The passages that mirror one another, such as Dante’s respective depictions of the stairs and Satan, acknowledge the inability of any one description to completely communicate Dante’s ideas. The reflective contextualization of these mirror passages serves to emphasize their individual insignificance, marking the first step towards redemption. Dante’s frequent allusions develop a system of motifs that relies upon the Comedy as a holistic work to convey meaning. The individual scenes and descriptions in the text sacrifice their authority as individual representatives of Dante’s philosophy in order to bolster one another by allusion. This structural development parallels the second step towards redemption.

Ultimately, the structure of the Comedy actively subverts Dante’s authority as an author to connect the reader directly with the pursuit of spiritual understanding. Dante is extremely limited in his ability to express concise theological observations because of the structure of the Comedy. His narrators are frequently unreliable and even his unmediated descriptions depend on a structure of allusions to elucidate their meaning. Dante’s own ideas about religion are concealed by the individual insignificance of his passages. The lack of authorial authority places the control of the search for spiritual truth in the hands of the reader. By relinquishing the power of interpretation to the reader, Dante debases his own poetic identity to empower the reader to use the Comedy as a medium for the exploration of spirituality. This ultimate substitution of individual identity for universal experience completes the criteria for redemption established by the Comedy itself.