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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 in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) and the Introduction to the Humanities Program (IHUM). Each quarter superior student work from courses in both programs is nominated and submitted to Boothe Prize committee judges. Winning papers are then collected for publication, and Boothe Prizes are awarded at a celebratory ceremony each spring in honor of these talented student writers and their instructors. As this collection of essays from spring and autumn 2009 and winter 2010 indicates, the selection process is no easy task at any of the judging stages. The essays represent the broad range and reach of many of Stanford’s first–year writers; they often are remarkable in their analytic power and sophisticated rhetorical skills, as well as their personal engagement with a topic or text. Their papers additionally reveal the varying kinds of research opportunities available to Stanford’s first–year students, and the quality of work students are able to do in a short period of time, usually on fairly unfamiliar material, all the while managing the difficult work of their other courses. 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 and IHUM students in offering the Boothe Prizes and making possible the publication of these essays. We also thank the Boothe Prize Selection Committees for PWR and IHUM and the Project Committee, a collaborative venture among faculty and staff from both PWR and IHUM who planned, edited, and produced The Boothe Prize Essays 2010. Most of all, our thanks to the many talented first–year writers whose essays were nominated for the Boothe Prize and, especially, to the students and instructors whose exemplary work now takes its place in the intellectual life of Stanford’s first–year programs.

—John Bravman
Freeman-Thornton Vice Provost for 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 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 the privilege of reading all of the essays nominated for the Boothe Prize each year. 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 heartiest congratulations to these writers as well as to their instructors.

—ANDREA A. LUNSFORD
Director, Program in Writing and Rhetoric

—MARVIN DIOGENES
Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
SPRING 2009 WINNER

Fannie Watkinson

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

Green building technologies promise to change how buildings are built and how they work. But does it matter whether green buildings look green?

Fannie Watkinson’s essay on the rhetoric of green skyscrapers answers this with an emphatic yes. She argues that the appearance of green buildings is of utmost importance as their looks make implicit arguments about the nature of and the appropriate response to the environmental crisis.

Fannie was able to navigate the perils of a new and potentially overwhelming topic by organizing green skyscrapers into three types and focusing on their rhetorical function within contemporary environmental discourse.

What Fannie terms no show green skyscrapers look like ordinary buildings, despite their often radical and sophisticated technologies. She argues that no show green skyscrapers squander an opportunity to make the environmental crisis more visible. What Fannie terms outfitted skyscrapers are a compromise: they look mostly like any other tall building, but for the addition of conspicuous solar panels or wind turbines. Such architectural forms she argues suggest that contemporary life can proceed more or less on a business as usual basis, with a few environmental features grafted on to assuage our anxieties.

The heroes of this essay are what Fannie terms vegetated skyscrapers, high-tech buildings that are often laced with vines and other greenery. What makes such buildings persuasive to Fannie’s eyes and to mine as well is what they seem to imply; namely that it is necessary to fundamentally change the way in which human and non-human life share this world. While most vegetated skyscrapers currently exist only as “paper architecture,” in this essay Fannie uses paper – words and images – to bring them to life, making a careful argument about why they should be built.

—Mark Feldman
The Rhetoric of Urban Life
The Role of Aesthetics:
Green Skyscrapers in the 21st Century

Fannie Watkinson

Imagine standing in front of a rack containing bags of potato chips. The many flavors and brands pop out at you as you glance over their titles. Some bags have relatively subdued graphics on them and only have a color and a name, like “Barbe-que” or “Salt & Vinegar.” Others that offer the same flavors come in multi-colored packages, packages with shiny letters and numbers, a creative font, enticing slogans. You are pulled this way and that, not loyal to any particular brand or even flavor. Eventually you settle on one and grab the colorful bag from the rack. What ultimately determined your choice? The packaging.

Everything has a container – an outside that holds whatever else is part of the object, person or animal. Whether this container is on the size of a cell or a planet, everything has this physical shell. Skyscrapers are no different. They have exteriors that are visible to anyone who cares to crane his or her neck back to glance up and interiors that house the floors and offices and people. Humanity is obsessed with looks. Mirrors, advertisements, body products and photographs all remind an individual of his or her physique/container. It is thus to be expected that much attention would be paid to the exterior of buildings, but little research has been done on the impact of building aesthetics and, in particular, green skyscraper aesthetics.

Fig. 1. A Series of Anticipated Green Skyscrapers,
Source: http://www.ecogeek.org/content/view/695/

Parceled in a Package
So how do green skyscraper appearances make an impact on their viewers? Think back to the bags of potato chips. Some bags advertise their use of organic potatoes. Others claim to have less fat than other competing brands. The packaging of green skyscrapers makes similar claims about their manufacture (how “organic” or “unorganic” it is) and future impact on the environment (how much “fat” will or will be induced). In order to delve further into such concepts, I will introduce Ken Yeang into the narrative. Ken Yeang is king of green skyscraper packaging. One of the most known green architects of the time, Yeang is one of the most radical in regards to his skyscraper designs and appearances. He believes that 80% of a building’s impact is in its design and by improving that, aiming towards minimal to zero impact, the world will be drastically better off (CNN.com). As a result, Yeang has an open mind when it comes to structural design. His approach towards buildings can be described as holistic: looking at the natural environment, the built environment and the junction between the two such that the end product is a structure that reflects these three components (CNN.com). In addition, he seeks something called ecomimesis in buildings, “a way to copy and paste nature into our high-rise designs” (Pasternack). These processes lead to very organic structures both in form and content. His trademark (from the material I have read and the pictures I have seen) is vegetation throughout the skyscraper. And as Pasternack comments on treehugger.com, an environmentally aware blog, “they look damn good – and definitely different.” Yeang’s green skyscrapers are all about breaking from the norm and constructing structures that are sustainable and co-existent with nature. Their packaging reflects it.

But what effect does such packaging have? First, skyscraper appearance is viewed more and more frequently as cities become more densely populated. In 2007, it was said that half the world’s population would live in urban centers and the number only keeps increasing (Yeang, Eco, 8). Cities provide easy access to a multitude of opportunities, attractions and people. Second, as global warming is finally recognized as a real and life-threatening problem, green movements are becoming more common and seen as more necessary. Cities are being looked to as a key to be energy efficient because cities are so densely packed and can hold many people within a small footprint relative to other settlements. Skyscrapers are not only the key to this dense settlement, but by using skyscrapers as models for sustainability, they become eye-catching prototypes for how buildings, cities and lifestyles can change to save this world. In short, the packaging of green skyscrapers is incredibly important in this day and age.

This paper divides green skyscrapers into three different categories according to their aesthetic: vegetated, outfitted or no-show. By analyzing the message each of these types sends about what cities should look like in the future, I argue that vegetated skyscrapers like those that Yeang has designed, demand the changes that need to occur. Cities need to be drastically re-imagined and radically re-constructed, re-integrating nature, the life-giver, into humanity’s many creations. Advancements in technology will not be enough to save the world if other measures are not taken to change the excessive lifestyles millions of humans lead. In an interview with Yeang, he comments “A lot of people think that if I put a green building [up (as opposed to a normal building/sky scraper)] everything is going to be fine, but actually it’s not just the green buildings we need, but green businesses, green governments, green economics. We have to extend the greening of buildings to our business and our lifestyles -- that is the most important thing to do next” (CNN.com). Skyscrapers are in a unique position of power to change the
mindset of these millions so that buildings, governments and lifestyles can be changed. This paper is at heart a tribute to the power of aesthetics and the power of perception to create, destroy and manipulate. It is a plea to use this aesthetic power towards creating changes necessary to our environment and our survival.

From Modernist Triumph to Harmonious Reintegration

The power of skyscrapers stems from what they symbolize. In order to understand this it is imperative to understand their brief history because while saying a city has skyscrapers today is almost unnecessary, skyscrapers are relatively new inventions. Their short history has radically changed the look and feel of cities throughout the past century. And ironically, until the past couple decades and the rise of green skyscrapers, the original structure was left unaltered (although the façade inevitably varied). This section depicts how skyscrapers have transitioned from symbols of modernity’s triumph to (increasingly) humanity’s harmonious reintegration with nature.

In 1885 Chicago, during the building boom after the Great Fire (where metal instead of flammable wood was used), the new Home Insurance Building rose floor by floor until it was taller than any building seen before.

It was a mere ten stories high (138 ft or 42m) and was built not by an architect but instead masterminded by an engineer, William Jenny, who figured out how to construct a building with a steel core that allowed stability at greater heights (Adams and LaSalle). The building was simply a steel frame that had “curtain” cladding. In other words, the exterior of the building was independent of the building’s stability and could be altered at will without compromising the building. In the next couple of years, and then throughout the century, this structure was replicated all over the country and world. But what made this building popular so immediately? The fact that it allowed many people to work in a small footprint within increasingly dense urban spaces certainly played a role, but there is something else, related to what skyscrapers symbolized.

The traditional “box” skyscrapers are bold, confident structures that tower dominioneringly over their surroundings. They look unnatural to this world because they are like nothing nature has made or could make. Inherent within their frames lies defiance. By seemingly denying gravity and nature’s organic, natural forms, they serve as larger-than-life trophies erected by humanity to confirm mankind’s power and triumph over nature. Just as Americans felt they had a right to expand westward across the North American continent, skyscrapers echo the principles of Manifest Destiny, but vertically and world-wide. Throughout the media, in films and advertisements, the skyscraper with its “dramatic proportions” and “striking visual impact,” has played a central role in perpetuating the notion of supreme dominance: the triumph of modernity, technology.
and humanity (McNeill, 45 and 47). Building the tallest skyscrapers “became a sought-after, prestigious trophy, which every building, client or city wanted to earn” (Lepik, 8). Their popularity and appeal came not only from their practicality but from the message their aesthetics sent about humanity.

But just as the early skyscrapers’ packaging was simply hung on and had no permanence, the conquest and dominance associated with skyscrapers too was just a loosely held facade. Increasingly the environment is telling humanity that in fact it is destructible and that nature is unconquerable (think of the tsunami in December 2004 and Hurricane Katrina). As this realization starts to sink in as a result of global warming and the food/energy crisis, skyscrapers are starting to reflect and perpetuate some of these mentality shifts. Finding ways to make the energy-guzzling skyscrapers green sends a new message to those who view the towering forms of skyscrapers. Yeang’s green skyscrapers bring vegetation and renewable, sustainable energy sources into skyscrapers. This visible change in aesthetics reinvents the way nature is seen within cities and challenge the depiction of human power. Green skyscrapers have the power to cause these large-scale changes in mentality but do they?

**Aesthetic Genres of Green Skyscrapers**

Even though the all-encompassing term “green skyscraper” suggests an equal “greenness” for all such structures, it turns out that greens skyscrapers are not all created equal. The aesthetics of green skyscrapers send different messages to their onlookers about humanity’s responsibility to their environment. They can be broken roughly into three different categories: vegetated, outfitted and no-show. Vegetated skyscrapers are those like Yeang’s that advertise heavy vegetation whereas outfitted skyscrapers instead boast one or more sustainable energy feature (wind turbines, solar panels etc). No-show skyscrapers are green buildings that simply do not look very different from traditional “box” skyscrapers. These skyscrapers may have a somewhat unique pattern on them or building structure, but they do not stand out as aesthetically green buildings. An analysis of three representative skyscrapers from these categories – the Singapore EDIT Tower, the Lighthouse Tower in Dubai and the New York Times Building in New York – illustrates the different messages these green buildings send about how cities must/should look through their aesthetic.

![Fig. 3. The Singapore EDIT Tower, Ken Yeang. Source: http://www.clubofpioneers.com/ and http://www.trendir.com/](http://www.clubofpioneers.com/ and http://www.trendir.com/)
While not yet constructed (construction is pending), the EDITT tower located in Singapore, Singapore is a prime example of a vegetated skyscraper. Constructed by Yeang, the 26-storey building occupies a central site within the city – a space that is surrounded by urban structures. Yeang describes these areas as “zeroculture sites which are devastated ecosystems that have none of its original top soil, flora and fauna remaining” (Eco 31). Because of this deficit, the EDITT tower tries to reintegrate the native plant species into the area by having them weave up through the skyscraper. The vegetated area occupies roughly half of the gross area of the tower and not only keeps the areas cooler in the tropical climate, but is watered by a rainwater collection system that works its way around and down the structure view scallop-shaped collectors that also double as sun shades. True to his particular attention to detail, Yeang conducted a survey to make sure that the new plants would not take over or negatively impact the little vegetation left in the surrounding ecosystem (Eco, 31). This vegetated skyscraper, like so many others of this category, also has been outfitted by sustainable energy features to further limit the building’s impact and has photovoltaic cells (solar panels) on the east and west sides as well as the roof. Both the dense vegetation on the skyscraper and these solar panels (which are not easily visible) work towards Yeang’s goal of using the sun’s energy as the ultimate (if not only) source of energy throughout the world. In an interview with CNN he comments, “Everything in nature comes from the sun but we use fossil fuels. Until we are able to run by imitating photosynthesis, it will be a long while until we can have a truly ecological system” (CNN.com).

Vegetated skyscrapers like the Singapore EDITT tower convey a strong message about the place of nature within cities. The “plant path” is undeniable: it consumes half the structure in a continuous pathway up half of the building. Consumes is a key word here. The visual of the vegetation on the green skyscraper is not passive – the plants are an active component and an active part of the message the vegetated skyscraper sends. It is similar to vines slowly crawling over an old building until the old structure has been effectively suffocated by nature’s messengers. While the plants on the EDITT tower are placed in such a way as to mimic the former visual and thus relay the message of nature’s ultimate supremacy, the plants are not suffocating the tower but working in harmony with it. This is the message vegetated skyscrapers send: cities need to be re-imagined with nature in mind and fully incorporated. Not only is this change necessary for humanity’s survival but also for humankind’s mental health which has been challenged by working in increasingly urbanized, metal-and-concrete-covered spaces. In order to make the unnatural space of the skyscraper more habitable, the natural needs to be re-infused on a large scale.

Outfitted skyscrapers, such as the Lighthouse Tower (planned to be constructed in Dubai, United Arab Emirates), look different and send a slightly different message than their vegetated cousins. The Lighthouse Tower is visually striking:
it looks somewhat like the Eiffel Tower and an amusement park ride mixed together into a 53-storey (400m) tall building. It is set to be built in the central district of the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), a 110-acre plot of land to become the world’s newest international financial center bridging Western Europe and East Asia (Killa). The architect, Shaun Killa, envisions it as a “prototype for low-carbon towers within the region and a model for more sustainable developments in the future” (Killa). It will have over 6,000 photovoltaic panels on the façade, three large wind turbines and will aim to reduce its total energy consumption by 55%. Additionally it will have passive solar architecture, low-energy/low-water engineering solutions and a structure that is determined by wind and sun patterns (Killa). Such a structure perfectly embodies the outfitted skyscraper because it incorporates many very visible sustainable technology features including photovoltaic cells, turbines and structural shape. These make the outfitted skyscraper a distinct feature in their environments and aesthetically broadcast their “green-ness.”

But they don’t send the exact same message as the vegetated skyscrapers. These green skyscrapers argue that measures need to be taken in order to save this world but that our technology can accomplish this. Instead of re-integrating the cities around the world into nature, buildings need only to be re-designed and/or re-fitted with sustainable technology. If engineers and architects are even more creative in their designs and come up with more means to improve the impact that skyscrapers, other buildings and cities have, then this energy and environmental crisis will be averted. But is that the truth or is it going to take more? From their appearance, outfitted skyscrapers argue that humanity’s continued advancement of technology will be enough to keep lifestyles as they are today.

No-show skyscrapers, such as the New York Times building, send yet another message. These green buildings do not provide any real visible message that suggests humanity needs to do anything differently on the planet. The New York Times building, located in central Manhattan on 8th Avenue between West 40th and 41st Streets, had a lot of potential for advertisement and certainly the New York Times took liberty in broadcasting that they were a green building. The 52-storey building designed by Renzo Piano is actually incredibly foresighted. It has a full-length double-skin curtain wall, a complex dimmable lighting system, a shading system, a co-generation system on site and under floor air distribution (Forest City Ratner Company). The building has floor-to-ceiling glass windows to maximize the light intake for the cooler months but then the double-skin curtain wall uses thousands of horizontal ceramic rods to keep the building cool. These rods reflect the sunlight and vary in color throughout the day according to sun intake. The dimmable lighting system
(the first of its kind, designed by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory) and the shading system work together to maximize the amount of natural light that is used such that electric lighting is employed only as a supplement. Instead of making decisions for the entire building, each area within the building is controlled separately to be more energy efficient. This has a real energy savings of about 30% (Forest City Ratner Company). Finally, the co-generator plant on site is able to supply about 40% of the building’s energy needs and using underfloor air distribution means that cool air rises naturally from the ground and does not have to be pushed down from the ceiling at a high velocity (and high energy).

These features are all fabulously creative and well designed to diminish the extremely tall skyscraper’s energy costs but they are not immediately apparent. The structure does not deviate much from the “box” skyscraper look so familiar to many cities’ skylines and even the ceramic tubes, one of the few features that are distinct, do not stick out radically from the surrounding skyscrapers’ appearances. The co-generator and the under floor air distribution system are not visible and yet they make a huge difference to the building’s sustainability. It is imperative that the exterior, then, of the skyscraper make it clear that this is a green building that is energy conscious. The most dangerous of the three types, the no-show skyscraper does not do justice to its “green” label because it does not advertise, visually, that it is a green building. It is not enough to be green and advertise through the media; the internet is too big and newspapers are only semi-permanent (quickly dying out). No-show skyscrapers such as the New York Times building, while energy efficient, do nothing to change the mentality of their viewers through building aesthetics.

**Watch What You Show!**

Packaging is important and green buildings, green skyscrapers in particular, are no exception. Vegetated, outfitted and no-show green skyscrapers all convey very different messages to their viewers simply because they look different. While all the types have appeal, No-show green skyscrapers are irresponsible because although they do take (sometimes large) steps towards combating the environmental crisis, they do not make this campaign known visually in a medium that has had and will continue to have so much aesthetic power. While vegetated and outfitted skyscrapers both distinguish themselves from the surrounding “box” skyscrapers and thus emit a message that something radical needs to be changed, they differ in what that change needs to look like. Outfitted skyscrapers argue that our quickly developing technology will be enough to finagle mankind out of these life-threatening times. Vegetated skyscrapers counter with a demand that nature has to be included in humanity’s urban constructions – nature’s place and role as life-giver cannot be denied further.

This is not to say that having 95% recycled steel (such as the New York Times building in New York) or sustainable energy sources inside are not worth having. On the contrary, the more these buildings can be sustainably designed and outfitted the better. Any effort in the way of decreasing humanity’s impact is a step in the right direction because every little bit counts but if green skyscrapers are going to be built, acknowledge the role of aesthetics and cover them in nature and sustainable energy features. Make them as distinct as possible! The more visible green structures are and the more they can incorporate nature, the better. Adding vegetation and sustainable technology
to green skyscrapers – the same skyscrapers that symbolized modernity’s triumph – is key to shifting the mindset of hundreds of thousands of people (cities are dense after all) from ignoring the environmental crisis to using it as a wake-up call to alter the destructive lifestyles we lead. Unless all of humanity realizes this, we will destroy the world (and either die or live within spaceships as depicted in WALL•E). Because of the bold, very visual building construct, green skyscrapers have the power to change the mentalities of their viewers by their aesthetics. Packaging is important: design green and re-imagine nature. This is the Green Dream of the future.

**A Taste of the Future: The Way Cities Could Look**

![Fig. 6. Recent Proposal for Eco-City in Hong Kong, Fig 7 Floating City Lily Pad Source: http://www.worldarchitecturenews.com/, Source: http://www.funis2cool.com/](image)
Works Cited


FALL 2009 WINNER

Karen Shen

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

In 2008, the Pew Center’s study “One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008” revealed that one of every 100 Americans was in jail or prison, which translates into more than three million people behind bars. Does this fact make you wonder why, and how, this has come to pass?

Karen Shen did, perhaps unknowingly at first, almost as soon as our course, “The Virtue of Vice and the Vice of Virtue: The Rhetoric of Criminality,” began. Analyzing Barbara Ehrenreich’s editorial “Is It Now a Crime to Be Poor?” Karen argued that while effective at calling attention to wasteful and cruel ordinances that criminalize and incarcerate the poor, the Ehrenreich’s’s failure “to present the reasons lawmakers use to support ordinances” and her “ambitious and sometimes absurd attempt to make incarceration for poverty something that could happen to anyone” likely caused skepticism amongst at least some of her New York Times readers.

Thereby inspired, or perhaps irritated is a better word, by Ehrenreich’s work, Karen spent the rest of the quarter researching the ordinances Ehrenreich satirizes, laws that Karen discovered are just one component of a larger system of punishment, “Quality-of-Life” policing. The result of her inquiry is the essay you are about to read: “The Paradox of Public Support for ‘Quality-of-Life’ Policing.” In it Karen explores why policies that target the visibly poor—citations and arrests for loitering/sleeping in public spaces and begging, among other “survival crimes”—thrive, despite their questionable benefit and their documented harm.

In “The Paradox of Public Support,” Karen leads us down a path that makes us question our thoughts and behaviors and forces us to ask whether what we say is really what we mean and if what we do is really what we say. Beware: Reading this essay may be the end of your complacency, and if it’s not, that will haunt you, too.

—Donna Hunter
The Virtue of Vice and the Vice of Virtue: The Rhetoric of Criminality

Karen Shen

The Paradox of Public Support for “Quality-of-Life” Policing

In a New York Times article titled “Two Candidates Present Two New Yorks” published less than a month before the 1993 New York City mayoral election between incumbent David Dinkins and challenger Rudy Giuliani, reporter Elizabeth Kolbert explains the drastically different messages offered by the two candidates. “In the New York City of Rudolph W. Giuliani’s television ads,” Kolbert writes, “people live in fear. They worry about drug dealers, high taxes, and bad schools” and are thus eager for the famously “tough” ex-US Attorney Giuliani to lead them. On the other hand, “in the New York of David N. Dinkins’s ads, people live in harmony. They favor conciliation and healing, and in times of trouble, they walk the streets together” (Kolbert). This contrast is similarly reflected in another New York Times article from a week before the election titled “The 1993 Campaign: The Undecided; Mayoral Race Still Perplexes Many Voters.” The article profiles still undecided voters “wishing, fruitlessly, for a candidate who combined what they saw as Mr. Giuliani’s toughness and Mayor Dinkins’s compassion” such as New York resident Emily Toney, who “is torn between voting for Rudolph W. Giuliani like her mother, who says she thinks he can ‘take the bull by the horns,’ and voting for David N. Dinkins because he has rebuilt housing in her depressed Brooklyn neighborhood” (Dugger).

On Election Day in 1993, fear won out over compassion in New York City with the election of Rudy Giuliani. A New York Times/WCBS-TV poll showed that 58 percent of New Yorkers believed that the city was less safe than four years ago and a skyrocketing crime rate that included over two thousand homicides a year lent validation to this view (Kolbert, Vitale 1). However, it was more than seeing crimes reported on TV or seeing such statistics in the news that made New Yorkers fearful. Their fears originated partly, perhaps even mainly, in the daily reminders of growing disorder—increasing numbers of homeless encampments, panhandlers, and drug dealers—on the streets of their city. By contrast, near the end of Giuliani’s second term as mayor in 2000, homelessness was largely erased from public view, crime had dropped to the lowest level in forty years, and New York City was widely hailed as the premier example of urban resurgence in the late 1990s (Vitale 1). While a variety of explanations have been offered to explain New York’s now legendary crime drop, Giuliani famously takes the bulk of the credit, claiming that the “quality-of-life” policing measures he introduced to the city—measures that
aggressively prosecuted minor offenses such as panhandling, vagrancy, or drinking in public—succeeded in reducing more serious crime by creating a sense of public order (Kelling). As a result of New York’s success, numerous cities across the nation adopted similar policies, policies that persist to this day.

However, it is widely recognized that these policies of fear rather than compassion also have the effect of criminalizing and harming those who commit these “offenses” as a means of survival, namely the visibly poor and the homeless. Given this consequence, many have questioned the necessity and ethics of these policies. However, the continued presence of these policies despite these objections suggests that something other than “justice” might be at play. To explore this possibility, I will first look more closely at the effects of quality-of-life policing on the poor and on crime. I will then examine the forces—both situational and rhetorical—that led to the public’s choice of fear over compassion and thus to the prominence of quality-of-life policing in the United States in the 1990s and today. With this background, I will finally ask what these forces say about our society’s values and prejudices, and how these values and prejudices affect and possibly compromise the administration of justice in our society.

**The Dark Side of Quality-of-Life Policing: Perpetuating the Marginalization of the Poor**

On the night of February 27, 1997, 30-year-old Army veteran Augustine Betancourt made a tube out of three cardboard boxes, slipped inside, and fell asleep on a bench in a public park in Lower Manhattan. Betancourt had slipped into homelessness a year earlier after three years of service in the Army, his then-undiagnosed major depression, anxiety disorders, and social phobias making it difficult for him to find a steady job following his honorable discharge. That night, Betancourt was awakened by a police sweep of the area and arrested, along with 24 others, under a 1969 sanitation ordinance that made it illegal for any person to erect any obstruction in a public place. It was Betancourt’s first arrest, but he was nonetheless strip-searched by the police and held for 27 hours in jail. Says Betancourt of the arrest, “The years I spent out in the street, people watch me collect cans or kids laugh when they see me at night getting into a cardboard box, I’ve never felt insulted or less than human. But incarcerated, I felt deprived of humanity” (Betancourt qtd. in Bernstein).

While the ordinance under which Betancourt was arrested was not new, its enforcement in such a context was. Though the law was originally intended to punish the abandonment of vehicles in public streets, it was identified in a 1994 guide to New York City law enforcement officers as a way to enforce Giuliani’s “Quality of Life” initiative and remove the homeless from sight. This tension between the law’s stated purpose and its use formed the basis of Betancourt’s suit against the city, which contended that the law he was arrested under was unconstitutionally vague and was being used solely as a way to target the homeless, and also that it was in violation of his right to travel (Bernstein, NHCLP and NCH 91-92, Chan, “Betancourt v. Giuliani”).

Betancourt’s arrest mirrors the arrests of thousands of other homeless people in cities across the country in the 1990s and today. In July 2009, the National Law Center on Homeless and Poverty (NLCHP) and the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) published their ninth report on the criminalization of homelessness, the first of which was published in 1991, titled *Homes Not Handcuffs: The Criminalization of Homelessness*
in U.S. Cities. The report finds that “many cities use the criminal justice system to punish people living on the street for doing things that they need to do to survive” (9). For example, 17% of the 235 cities surveyed by the advocacy groups have city-wide prohibitions on “camping,” 19% prohibit loitering, and 23% prohibit begging. An even greater number (33%, 47%, and 47%, respectively) prohibit such actions in particular public spaces. Additionally, cities also selectively enforce more neutral laws such as loitering or jaywalking against the homeless and conduct sweeps of city areas where the homeless live to reduce their presence (9-10).

The report also identifies the “Ten Meanest Cities” in America, those cities that represent the worst of these policies. In the meanest city, Los Angeles, the NLCHP and the NCH find that the city spends six million dollars a year on fifty extra police officers to crack down on “crime” in Skid Row, one of the largest stable populations of homeless people in the United States with a population of seven or eight thousand homeless. These officers primarily work to make arrests and issue citations for “crimes” such as jaywalking and loitering that rarely produce written citations elsewhere (34). Such citations are particularly harmful to the homeless and the poor because if they are unable to pay the fine, as most are, they are jailed and obtain a criminal record that may prevent them from getting social services or from getting a job (NHLCP and NCH 35). Indeed, ethnographic research shows that incarcerating the homeless for quality-of-life crimes can contribute to a cycle of incarceration and homelessness that is “more powerful than the sum of its parts, a racialized exclusion/punishment nexus which germinates, isolates, and perpetuates lower-class male marginality” (Gowan 500). Thus, quality-of-life policing can have the ultimate effect of condemning the visibly poor and the homeless to perpetual poverty and/or incarceration and removing any chance for them to become productive members of society.

The motto of “zero tolerance” that accompanies these policing practices only further exacerbates this marginalization by condoning the targeting of the homeless by law enforcement. The NLCHP and the NCH report a scene in Los Angeles where two police officers “attacked a petite homeless woman, who may have been mentally disabled, with clubs and pepper spray” (34). And in the second meanest city, St. Petersburg, Florida, police raided two homeless camps in 2007—seizing and slashing tents, including some that were still occupied (Raghunathan and Ulferts, NHLCP and NCH 36). Incidents like these lend validity to Betancourt’s assertion that quality-of-life policing reduces the homeless to something “less than human.”

Nevertheless, the district court in Betancourt’s case rejected all of Betancourt’s claims regarding the ordinance, though it granted that Betancourt had been subjected to an illegal strip search. The court ruled that since the statute penalized “obstructing,” not occupying, public space, and clearly defined what would be considered an “obstruction,” it neither imposed on Betancourt’s right to travel nor was it excessively vague. The United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed the lower court’s decision, though Betancourt did garner a dissenting opinion in the three-judge appeals panel (Bernstein, NHCLP and NCH 91-92, Chan, “Betancourt v. Giuliani,” “Betancourt v. Bloomberg”). Though Betancourt did not attempt an appeal to the Supreme Court and the ordinance was thus upheld, his challenge of quality-of-life policing nonetheless raises questions about the ethics of such policies. The common man would likely not have considered Betancourt a “criminal.” After all, he was doing nothing more than just trying
to stay warm for the night; he did not do harm to any identifiable person or property. And yet, he was treated as a criminal by our laws and our justice system, and this treatment was even upheld under judicial scrutiny. To fully understand how this is possible, we must first ask what could justify such a broad reach of the criminal justice system.

On Shaky Ground:

The Questionable Rationale behind Quality-of-Life Policing

Advocacy for quality-of-life policing is generally based on a theory of criminality first advanced by Harvard academics James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling. Known as the “broken windows” theory, Wilson and Kelling argue that violent crime actually stems from the violation of “informal controls” governing public order, such as the presence of panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, or the mentally disturbed. When such violations are allowed to occur, people stop policing their community or believing in the police’s ability to stop crime, which in turn increases more serious crime because criminals have less to fear of being caught. Wilson and Kelling equate this theory of crime with a phenomenon previously observed by social psychologists and police officers whereby “if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken” (2-3). In this case, “the unchecked panhandler is, in effect, the first broken window” (5). Quality-of-life policing is thus a natural product of the broken windows theory since it requires the police to aggressively prosecute all minor crimes and violations of public order.

Unfortunately, though quality-of-life policing tactics have been widely implemented across the country, the empirical proof of their effectiveness in reducing violent or more serious crime is minimal, even in New York City. Difficulties arise in separating the effects of these tactics on the crime drop in New York City from the other crime-prevention strategies that were implemented around the same time and from other sociological changes. Indeed, a 2006 assessment of the evidence done by John Eck and Edward Maguire in *The Crime Drop in America* finds that for zero-tolerance policing, “empirical support for [the] underlying theory is weak,” and that there is “little evidence of an effect on violent crime in New York, and no evidence nationwide” (246).

Given the lack of any solid empirical backing for the use of quality-of-life policing as a crime prevention strategy, why do city governments continue to employ it so extensively, especially given its negative effect on the poor? The most probable answer appears to be that governments perceive economic benefits from the criminalization of quality-of-life violations. City governments and businesses worry that if visible signs of poverty and disorder such as panhandling or homeless encampments are permitted on the streets and near business establishments, tourists and local customers will stay away out of disgust, fear, or discomfort (Skolnik; Lee and Farrell 300). Once again, however, these beliefs lack solid empirical backing, and rely solely on anecdotal evidence from business owners who have seen customers turn away after seeing disorder. A 2003 survey using about 1500 telephone interviews done by Barrett Lee and Chad Farrell found that such customers are the exception rather than the rule. They reported that “few respondents (roughly one-tenth) have changed their shopping, entertainment, or transportation routines due to heavy exposure to panhandling and homelessness” (318) and even fewer have changed their behavior due to the mere presence of homeless persons. Their research also reveals that almost all respondents support the right to panhandle
Lee and Farrell thus write that “such a conclusion raises the possibility of a mismatch between public opinion and public policy” (318).

Indeed, it appears that in the area of quality-of-life policing, a couple of “mismatches” are occurring. There is a mismatch between its perceived benefits and the empirical support of those benefits and there is a mismatch between perceived public support of these policies and actual public support. The ultimate result is a mismatch that is potentially disastrous: one between the usefulness and effectiveness of quality of life policing and its extensive implementation. The question then becomes, how did such mismatches occur?

How Quality-of-Life Policing Rose to Power

It is important to remember that even if the public does “support the right to panhandle” and even if they don’t change where they do business based on the presence of panhandlers or the homeless, this supposed compassion and fearlessness clearly did not translate into actual votes against quality-of-life policing in the 1990s since it is the public that voted in the “tough on crime” candidates such as Giuliani who implemented quality-of-life policing. What happened? Looking specifically at the factors surrounding the 1993 New York City mayoral election, I hope to answer this question by showing how the generation of a fear so great that it completely outshone compassion by the media, the Giuliani campaign, and economic conditions resulted in the public’s ultimate selection of quality of life policing.

The first contributing factor to the New Yorkers’ widespread fear was the sheer reality of growing disorder and crime in their city—disorder and crime fueled largely by an enormous increase in the rich/poor gap in the 1970s and 1980s. The globalization and industrialization of the economy meant that thirty-eight million American jobs were lost in the 1970s in manufacturing and related employment to the Third World and to technology (Davey xiv, Vitale 95). Recognizing an impossible task, many cities in the United States thus decided to focus their efforts on attracting international capital by stimulating industries such as finance, insurance, and real estate and developing high-end real estate rather than chase working class jobs and build low-cost housing. The ultimate product of these economic conditions was a growing and ever more visible underclass that was forced to participate in visible acts of disorder such as panhandling, sleeping in public spaces, and crime.

Adding to the public’s fear and desperation was the inadequacy of existing governmental solutions to this underclass which generally followed a political philosophy sometimes known as “urban liberalism” that dominated American city governments following World War II and through the 1990s. Urban liberalism was characterized by a belief in personal rehabilitation, a tolerance of social differences, a support for civil liberties, and an advocacy of government-led social work solutions to social problems. Translated to policies regarding the underclass, urban liberals thus tended to favor individualized corrective solutions such as hiring more social workers, creating emergency shelters, and instituting welfare-to-work programs (Vitale 54). Starting in the 1990s, however, such solutions proved unable to handle the massive amounts of homelessness and poverty that the nation faced and disorder remained as visible as ever.

Faced with a choice, therefore, between a status quo that was failing to show any progress toward reducing crime and disorder and any sort of change, it seems plausi-
ble that the public would have opted for change for the sake of change alone. Indeed, *The New York Times* notes that Giuliani’s early television ads “featured ordinary New Yorkers, voicing their fears and frustrations,” but “never laid out in any detail what the Republican-Liberal candidate would do to solve the city’s problems, apparently believing that simply outlining the problems will suffice” (Kolbert). However, I will further explore how the media’s sensationalistic descriptions of these problems created an atmosphere of fear and desperation so thick that it was almost inevitable that the public would opt for the introduction of quality-of-life policing.

First, the period between 1973 and 1991 saw a dramatic increase in the percentage of serious crime that was reported to officials, from about 24 to 42.3 percent of serious offenses being reported. The result was that crime statistics such as the yearly FBI *Uniform Crime Report* that reports “offenses known to law enforcement,” showed a marked increase in crime of about 40 percent even though surveys measuring crime victimization such as the less widely reported *National Crime Survey* actually showing a crime decrease of about 20 percent during the same time (Davey 86; Bureau of Justice Statistics; FBI). It was the FBI statistic that made the news. A survey of *New York Times* articles in 1993 on crime finds titles such as “What are we going to do about crime?”; “Beset by Crime, a City Struggles for Answers”; and “Grim Times in Big Cities Make Law and Order Top Issue.” Furthermore, the media’s obsession with the story of increasing crime was not limited to newspapers. In 1993, the Center for Media and Public Affairs reported that crime stories on network television had doubled from just the previous year, making one of every eight stories (Mauer 172). These drastic increases in crime reporting to officials and in sensationalistic reporting of crime to the public collided in the early 1990s to have the ultimate effect of creating a sense in New Yorkers and other Americans that they were in great danger of becoming victims of serious crime, that this danger was spiraling out of control, and that it needed to be stopped through any means possible (Meier).

A similar type of sensationalistic rhetoric was employed by the media in relation to rising homelessness and disorder. In an analysis in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology* of the rhetorical processes used in Canada to successfully portray “squeegee kids”—homeless youth who cleaned car windshields for money—as a problem requiring punitive government intervention, Patrick Parnaby notes that it was crucial to create the sense that these squeegee kids were “symptomatic of an impending state of disaster” (292). To do this, the media first used hyperbolic descriptions of the size of the problem—comparing the spread of squeegee kids to the spread of dandelions, the arrival of Canadian geese, or the spread of a deadly disease. They also frequently reported on public fear regarding the squeegee kids, which served to cast the kids as villains rather than victims. Surveying articles from the New York Times in the early 1990s yields similar rhetoric used to describe the problem of homelessness, with one article writing about “homeless and destitute people...flooding city streets” (Steinfels), another writing about the “vast numbers of homeless people...on New York City’s streets” (Finder), and another reporting that the Upper West Side neighborhood that “is living in absolute terror” of a homeless man (Shapiro).

It seems thus likely that politicians capitalized on this fear of crime and the homeless, a fear created by economic realities and exacerbated by the media’s sensationalistic rhetoric, to pass policies such as quality-of-life policing. More interesting, however, is
how they justified such tactics to the public as more than necessary evils, but rather posi-
tive policies that should remain even in less desperate times. At the core of this achieve-
ment was the use of the phrase “quality of life” to represent these policies, because it hid
the punitive nature of these policies. After all, at face value, it seems impossible to op-
pose the promotion of a better “quality of life.” Even if one were to think more carefully
about what the phrase might entail in the realm of public policy, one might imagine that
improving the “quality of life” in the city would mean increasing social services for the
destitute or homeless, those with the worst “qualities of life.” Indeed, President Johnson
used the term in a letter urging Congress to create the Department of Housing and Ur-
ban Development, writing, “The problem is people and the quality of lives they lead. We
want to build not just housing units but neighborhoods; not just to construct schools,
but to educate children; not just to raise income, but to create beauty” (Johnson qtd. in
Vitale 33).

However, in the context of city governments, “quality of life” has now come to
denote the quality of life of a more specific population, namely the middle and upper
classes. It seems that this redefinition of “quality of life” issues—a phrase that carries
strong positive connotations of compassion—was orchestrated by campaigns such as
Giuliani’s to make policies that criminalize the behavior of the poor seem less selfish and
cruel. This redefinition is clearly seen in a 1993 New York Times article titled “Giuliani
Zeroing In on Crime Issue” that notes there is “an emphasis by Mr. Giuliani on what his
campaign calls ‘quality of life’ issues”:

He has assailed “the disorder that is driving the city down,” promis-
ing a crackdown on street drug dealers, panhandlers and menacing
“squeegee men.” And last week he unveiled a policy to curtail ser-
vices drastically to some of the city’s homeless by setting a 90-day
limit on many shelter stays,… (Mitchell)

It seems possible that repeated enough times, the association between policies that
criminalize the poor and and a better “quality of life” for everyone became increasingly
natural and ingrained in the public’s minds, so that these policies were seen as obviously
positive and even “compassionate” actions—the plight of the poor disappearing from
the public’s minds.

Today, many of the same factors are at play to generate the same fear as in the 1990s.
Extreme poverty is again on the rise, with cities reporting on average a 12 percent in-
crease in homelessness in 2008 (NHCLP and NCH 14). And the public is once again
desperate for a solution and willing to sacrifice compassion for one. In a 2009 New York
Times editorial, Barbara Ehrenreich writes that “in defiance of all reason and compa-
sion, the criminalization of poverty has actually been intensifying as the recession gener-
ates ever more poverty.” Indeed, the NLCHP and the NCH report an increase of more
than 5% in laws prohibiting camping, loitering, or begging in particular public places
since 2006 (10-11).

The reasoning for these policies seems to mirror the reasoning of the 1990s. On
October 9, 2007, the San Francisco Chronicle ran a front-page article titled “‘Enough is
enough,’ San Francisco says of homeless” (Nevius). The article points to an informal
poll that shows that 90 percent of respondents in the famously compassionate city sup-
port a crackdown on the homeless. The Chronicle quotes the executive director of San
Francisco’s Human Services Agency invoking similar rhetoric to Giuliani in 1993 when
he says, “this is quality of life for everyone” and “maybe, you just need a guy with a badge
standing over them and saying, you can’t stay there anymore” (Rhorer qtd. in Nevius). The connection between these polices as a result of poor economic conditions, fear, and deceptive rhetoric thus seems clear. But are these policies the only possible result of these factors? And if not, what does our acceptance of quality-of-life policing as the result of these factors say about our society?

Quality-of-Life Policing as an Exposure of Hidden Flaws in Our Society

In explaining the rise of quality-of-life policing, history seems to have taken much of the blame off of the public. After all, we had no other choice. We were facing desperate times. We were, so to speak, “tricked” by the media and the government into believing that what we were choosing was for the best for everyone. After all, surveys have shown that we don’t truly believe in those policies. However, this raises the question, why were we so passive? Faced with two unappealing outlooks—continued disorder or the marginalization of the poor—why did we simply accept those two outlooks as our choices rather than fight for a third option? And why do we so easily forgive that passivity and its resultant policies simply because they were created out of fear?

Our passivity raises the possibility that quality-of-life policing is really in line with hidden public desires for “public order” and a higher “quality of life” for the upper and middle classes at whatever cost to the poor and that the public is simply unwilling to outwardly express such desires. An interesting exchange is developed where the public is allowed to maintain a moral high ground and “support the right to panhandle.” On the other hand, the government “does the dirty work,” but is rewarded with the security of knowing that it has the public’s support behind it on Election Day. After all, Giuliani’s 1997 reelection victory clearly shows that the public was not so outraged with his treatment of the poor to allow it to influence their vote. In this way, choosing the path of fear by voting for quality-of-life policing becomes a guiltless process. However, even so, there still needs to be some motivation to take such a path. What might such a motivation be, if research has provided mixed evidence of a benefit of quality-of-life policing to crime deterrence or economic goals? In the rest of this section, I will first show how because the visibly poor are perceived as less than human by those with jobs and homes, choosing the path of fear and criminalizing their survival actions is not only guiltless, but trivial and easy. Next, I will propose that the public is motivated to enact that easy and guiltless criminalization because criminalization removes the visibly poor from sight and thus eliminates the discomfort and guilt one might feel when one is forced to see visible poverty.

In 2006, Princeton University psychologists Lasana T. Harris and Susan T. Fiske published a study in Psychological Science that used neuroimaging to examine brain activations in ten participants viewing forty-eight photographs of social groups and objects. They use a previously proposed “stereotype content model” that suggests that societal groups are assessed as intending either help or harm, a factor they call the “warmth” of the group, and as either capable or not capable of enacting those intentions, a factor they call “competence” (847). A perception of high warmth and high competence yields the emotion of pride, one associated with middle-class Americans, American Olympic athletes, and space shuttles. On the other hand, a perception of low warmth and high competence elicits feelings of “envy,” an emotion associated with rich people and sports cars, while one of high warmth and low competence brings “pity,” associated with the
elderly, the disabled, or a cemetery. The final category, characterized by a perception of low warmth and low competence, elicits the emotion of disgust and corresponds to homeless people, drug addicts, and an overflowing toilet (848).

Harris and Fiske postulate that this disgust is the “most extreme form of prejudice, simultaneous dislike and disrespect” and thus “uniquely captures dehumanizing prejudice” (Harris and Fiske 848). To prove their theory, they measure activity in a part of the brain activated when people engage in “social cognition,” when they are thinking about a person rather than an object, and find that there is a relative lack of activation in the viewing of “low-low social groups” (Harris and Fiske 852), suggesting that the participants do not view these social groups as human. Harris and Fiske conclude that “this kind of evidence could begin to help explain the all-too-human ability to commit atrocities such as hate crimes, prisoner abuse, and genocide against people who are dehumanized” (Harris and Fiske 852).

This evidence can also begin to explain the public’s ability to support quality-of-life policing. Indeed, there is telling evidence of a dehumanization of the homeless in the growing problem of hate crimes against the homeless. A study by the NCH finds that in the last eight years, there have been attacks on the homeless in over 200 cities—68 percent by teenagers who “think they can beat up a homeless person because nobody will care” (Stoops qtd. in “New Focus on Homeless Attacks, Victims”). An NPR interview with David Curdle, a former homeless shelter resident in Washington, D.C. offers some insight into why these hate crimes occur. He says, people commit these crimes because “it is just something to do, not even somebody to pick on. Because they don’t think of homeless people as human beings” (Curdle qtd. in “New Focus on Homeless Attacks, Victims”). Attacking the homeless thus becomes easy because the perpetrators of these attacks do not need to overcome huge objections by their consciences because they do not see the homeless as “human.” If this kind of violence is possible, it seems likely that simply voting for quality-of-life policing would be even more possible and even easier.

However, one might expect the homeless to elicit feelings of pity rather than dehumanizing disgust. Harris and Fiske write that the difference between these two perceptions is whether the homeless are perceived as being “warm” and having good intentions. But why do people perceive the homeless as having bad intentions and why did these problems of quality-of-life policing and homeless hate crimes only develop in the last two decades? The answer to both these questions may be that this dehumanizing prejudice was not always present because the homeless were not always perceived as having bad intentions. A 1991 New York Times article titled “Shifts in Feelings on the Homeless: Empathy Turns Into Frustration” notes that “in the second decade of widespread and obvious homelessness,” some cities have actually “taken steps to keep the homeless from abusing the public’s generosity,” and blames these poor perceptions of the motives of the homeless on the public’s exposure to “career panhandlers” who take advantage of the public’s sympathy and are indistinguishable from the truly downtrodden (Wilkerson). In essence, a decade of homelessness allowed these career panhandlers to erode pity for the homeless as a whole and replace it with the dehumanizing disgust that prompted the introduction of quality-of-life policing in the early 1990s. However, is even disgust to a dehumanizing extent sufficient motivation to criminalize the actions of an entire group of people? It seems unlikely that entire cities would choose to expend resources on this criminalization simply because it is “something to do.” Therefore, I wish to explore one
other response to the visibly poor, a desire to hide them from sight to maintain a belief in a just world, that not only allows the public to criminalize the poor but actively motivates such criminalization.

Research has shown that a “society’s penal climate or its relative punitiveness is linked to its relative egalitarianism: the greater a society’s tolerance of inequality, the more extreme the scale of punishment utilized” (Wilkins and Pease qtd. in Mauer 39). In his book *Race to Incarcerate*, Marc Mauer, executive director of the Sentencing Project, uses this fact to explain the United States’ relatively harsh sentencing practices. “Sentencing severity,” Mauer writes, is a type of negative reward for those at one end of the spectrum” (39), akin to the negative reward of poverty that capitalists believe is justified to the lazy or idle. So if a society is accustomed to the inequalities generated by capitalist and individualistic economies, it more easily accepts any other inequalities, even inequalities in the supposedly neutral justice system. Applied to the issue of quality-of-life policing, it seems therefore that a capitalistic society is able to believe that the punishment accorded to the visibly poor by quality-of-life policing is truly deserved. A theory advanced by Melvin Lerner in his book *The Belief in a Just World* known as the “Just World Theory” offers some insight into how this sentiment develops. Lerner writes that people have a tendency to believe that they live in a “just world,” one where certain actions or attributes of a person naturally correspond to either good or bad outcomes. This belief forces people, when faced with a bad outcome such as poverty, to reinterpret the situation to match their expectations, often by blaming the outcome on some fault in the victim (Lerner 20).

Where does this belief in a just world originate? Lerner offers a few possibilities. He postulates that this belief might originate from personal observations that most people who are suffering are suffering because of some common character trait(s) and from cultural wisdom or morality tales that teach the inevitable triumph of good and punishment of evil. The other part of the creation of such a belief is purely psychological: such a belief serves the purpose of allowing people to avoid being upset at the reality of injustice and also mirrors a basic human cognitive tendency to create “balance” and associate all positive events, traits, and attributes with one another and all negative things with each other (Lerner 11-14).

Lerner supports his theory primarily by applying to the victims of crimes showing, how people generally reject the idea of a completely “innocent victim.” However, his theory seems readily applicable to our perception and criminalization of visible poverty. Our acceptance of quality-of-life policing indicates that we first blame poverty on some fault in the impoverished, and are then able to believe that punishment by our justice system for those “faults” is justified. These beliefs allow us to maintain our belief in a just world rather than take the more difficult route of facing and fighting apparent injustices in our society.

This theory alone, however, simply says that when we see extreme poverty or the criminalization of it, we are able to and would rather accept and justify it than fight it. It still does not offer a clear-cut motive for that criminalization. Therefore, I will argue that in cases where injustices are so obvious and pervasive that it is impossible to continually reinterpret these injustices, people are motivated instead to hide these injustices from sight. This would not be the first time that poverty has been hidden from sight. Michael Harrington’s influential book *The Other America*, which served as a driving force behind
Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, begins with a chapter titled “The Invisible Land” in which Harrington notes how the “other America,” the impoverished, have largely vanished from sight. “There is a familiar America,” Harrington writes, that is “celebrated in speeches and advertised on television and in the magazines,” one that “has the highest mass standard of living the world has ever known” (1). On the other hand, “the millions who are poor in the United States tend to become increasingly invisible. Here is a great mass of people, yet it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them” (2). Harrington points to economic factors such as the development of the American city and the corresponding suburbs and slums in postwar America served to segregate poverty so that the middle class never had to come into contact with true poverty. The result was an isolated poor population with no political voice and no connection to the rest of America, a population thus condemned to marginalization unless something changed. Harrington thus ends his introduction by urging that poverty become more visible so that it can be fixed, stating, “We must perceive passionately, if this blindness is to be lifted from us. A fact can be rationalized and explained away; an indignity cannot” (19).

Harrington’s ensuing exposure of the invisible world of poverty effectively encouraged action on poverty. Today, poverty is no longer invisible in the same way as it was in the 1950s and the 1960s. However, the criminalization of poverty plays essentially the same role as suburbanization did then. Outlawing the public presence of the poor, forbidding public acts of survival, and incarcerating those who break these laws clearly serves to reduce the visibility of the extremely poor. In this way, we minimize our guilt about poverty and comfortably preserve our belief in a just world. However, we also preclude real solutions to poverty by taking away any motivation for policymakers or the public to help end it.

So what does our acceptance of the criminalization of quality-of-life offenses say about our society? We have seen that our acceptance of quality-of-life policing reflects a dehumanization of the visibly poor, a desire to rationalize their suffering, and a tendency to hide them from sight whenever possible to avoid the guilt and discomfort that accompanies their presence. These reactions seem to therefore indicate a hidden stigmatization of the poor in our society, a stigmatization that we condone because of its basis in fear. Indeed, criminalization can be seen as the ultimate form of stigmatization—not only does it constitute the rejection of a way of life, but it imposes punishment for that way of life through our supposedly neutral “justice system.” This idea, that a stigmatization of the poor based in public fear might somehow be translating into a structural stigmatization of the poor in criminal law, clearly merits further investigation. It raises the final question I will address in this paper: is justice really being administered by these laws? Is it really a crime to be poor?

Justice or the Lack Thereof in the Criminalization of Quality-of-Life Offenses

It must first be noted that the idea of the stigmatization of the poor by the justice system is not a new one, and that its backing reaches far beyond the criminalization of quality-of-life offenses. In an essay titled “Punishing the Poor: Dilemmas of Justice and Difference” in the 2000 book From Social Justice to Criminal Justice: Poverty and the Administration of Criminal Law, Barbara Hudson, a Legal Studies professor at the University of Central Lancashire, points out that criminal law as a whole in the United States
places a disproportional amount of emphasis on “crimes of the poor,” such as property crimes. On the other hand, crimes of the rich—tax fraud, the neglect of health and safety regulations, and insider dealing—are often dealt with in civil law and “paid for mainly by money” rather than incarceration (Hudson 199). This is despite the fact that these crimes may in fact “cause far more harm than the crimes of the people who make up the largest proportion of prison inmates” (Hudson 201). The stigmatization of the poor in our society seems then to be deeply ingrained in our justice system and who it considers a “criminal.” This may begin to explain public complacency in the face of quality-of-life policing; perhaps we are so used to the idea that criminals are poor and the poor are criminals that we do not even stop to think when policies that criminalize the poor are enacted.

This naturally raises the question: should it be a crime to be so poor that you must use public space to survive? To answer this question, we must examine the purpose of our justice system. Hudson writes that “to a criminologist, ‘crimes’ are simply kinds of behavior that are subject to criminal sanctions” rather than being “defined by some moral or other behavioral referent (harmful, immoral, or anti-social behavior) because too many kinds of behavior would be left out and there would be no social consensus about some that are included” (198). While this is certainly debatable, it should be clear that under any definition of crime, people can only justly be subject to criminal sanctions if those sanctions serve some justifiable purpose.

Of course, the purposes of criminal punishment have also been challenged, reinforced, and adjusted for years. However, a few overarching themes seem to dominate the discussion. In his paper on “Purposes of Punishment: Effects of Utilities of Criminal Sanctions on Perceived Appropriateness” in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Robert McFatter details the five “most commonly cited justifications for imposing specific sanctions on offenders” (255). They are incapacitation, physically restraining the criminal from further offenses; retribution, imposing a penalty on the criminal reflective solely of the crime committed; rehabilitation, changing a criminal’s behavior to be less criminal; general deterrence, showing the consequences of a crime to prevent other offenders; and individual deterrence, preventing the criminal from committing future crime through fear of punishment (255). None of the motivations for quality-of-life policing that I have outlined thus far seem to directly match any of these stated purposes of punishment. The closest match appears to be between the purpose of “general deterrence” and Wilson and Kelling’s “broken windows theory.” However, general deterrence is supposed to act by directly showing potential offenders the consequences of their actions. The broken windows theory, on the other hand, does not directly show potential criminals the consequences of their crimes, but rather attempts to achieve a reduction in crime by creating a general awareness of tough policing by criminalizing lesser offenses. The other motivations—economic pressure by businesses, social pressure from a fearful or disgusted public, and a desire to appease the discomfort and guilt that accompanies seeing the extremely poor and the injustices in our society that they reflect—seem to clearly exceed the bounds of why we enact criminal sanctions and thus exceed the bounds of justice. By criminalizing quality-of-life offenses, we are thus practicing, at best, “justice plus”—using the “broken windows theory” as a way to justify a host of other unjust motivations—and at worst, no justice at all. In both cases, justice has clearly been compromised and some rethinking of
what we consider a crime will be necessary to restore it.

However, it is important to note that this “rethinking” implies a more systematic change beyond simply challenging the criminalization of quality-of-life policies under the existing legal framework, as many homeless advocates have done with limited success. The case of Augustine Betancourt is a case in point: his case was decided on the letter of the law and under the existing framework of our justice system, and so was likely to fail.

**Conclusion**

Today, we are again in a time of economic crisis. Across the country, we are therefore constantly being faced with a choice between fear and compassion, as New York was in 1993. It may be argued that the 2008 election of President Barack Obama showed today’s public’s choice of compassion over fear. Indeed, Obama based his campaign on the slogans of “Hope” and “Yes We Can,” messages that seem to mirror those of Dinkins that New Yorkers rejected in 1993. However, we should also recall that on a national level, 1992 brought the election of President Bill Clinton, whose domestic campaign platform centered on compassion for the working class and promises to close the gap between the rich and the poor. Therefore, it seems that voting for compassion on a national level does not necessarily imply compassionate policies closer to home. And indeed, on a local level today, as documented by the NLCHP and the NCH, we have actually seen an increase in policies that criminalize “quality-of-life” offenses. It seems that though we may value and advocate compassion on a grand scale, when the “dangers” and potential consequences of that compassion are immediate and visible, we are ultimately too afraid to risk our own comfort for compassion’s sake.

This contrast between our ideals and our actions and the choice of fear over compassion is not isolated to our treatment of the visibly poor. It seems to appear in other initiatives that would criminalize or stigmatize an “out-group” of our society. For example, we can look to the New York State Senate’s December 2009 vote to reject a bill that would have allowed gay couples to wed. Explaining why the momentum had turned against gay marriage even in “heavily Democratic New York,” the deputy Republican leader Senator Tom Libous stated that “certainly this is an emotional issue and an important issue for many New Yorkers. I just don’t think the majority care too much about it at this time because they’re out of work, they want to see the state reduce spending, and they are having a hard time making ends meet. And I don’t mean to sound callous, but that’s true” (Libous qtd. in Peters). Similarly, the decision by California voters in 2008 to approve Proposition 8, a state constitutional amendment to recognize only marriage between a man and a woman, surprised many because of California’s famously liberal leanings and opinion polls close to Election Day that showed California voters in favor of allowing same-sex unions (Public Policy Institute of California, Survey USA). The callousness and selfishness created by fear in these states clearly stands in direct contradiction with the compassion that these states are expected to exhibit. Why do such contradictions occur?

The evidence suggests that they occur because choosing the path of fear in our society is easy. Our society seems to grant enormous amounts of ethical leeway to policies based in fear. It seems to be socially acceptable to support policies such as quality-of-life policing that unjustly marginalize the poor simply because such policies are mo-
tivated by fear, a fear created in 1993 by poor economic realities and the sensationalistic rhetoric of the media and the Giuliani campaign. In addition to being guiltless policies in and of themselves, these policies also actively absolve the public from guilt over an even larger issue, the gross and possibly unjust economic inequalities produced by capitalism, by eliminating the visible proof of these inequalities.

On the other hand, rejecting quality-of-life policing and pursuing the path of compassion would doubtless be more difficult. First, it is unclear what exactly such a path would entail, although opponents of quality-of-life policing generally advocate as a starting point removing “the run-of-the-mill property offenses often described as ‘survival crimes of the poor’ from the system” and promoting long-term solutions to extreme poverty in their stead (Hudson 206). In fact, the NLCHP and the NCH report that jail costs are actually two to three times higher than permanent supportive housing or shelter costs (19). If these types of solutions succeed, it is likely that public order can still be achieved without compromising the integrity of our justice system and condemning the poor to a cycle of incarceration and poverty. However, the success of these policies is uncertain and no matter what, they will inevitably require some sacrifices. After all, solving extreme poverty is no easy task even if we do set our minds to it. But perhaps instead of granting ethical leeway to policies based in fear, we should instead grant pragmatic leeway to policies based in compassion.

Nonetheless, it may be that first step of “setting our minds to it” that proves the most difficult because it requires a defiance of what seems to be human nature in individualistic societies. After all, it will be necessary to acknowledge that our world is not an absolutely just one and that even seemingly neutral institutions such as our justice system might operate unjustly. It will be necessary to face the proof of those injustices rather than hide them away. And it will be necessary that we refrain from allowing our inner prejudices and fears to influence our policies. Only then will we be able to truly advance justice in our society.

Notes
1 See Blumstein for more detail on other explanations for the crime drop, as well as analysis of the empirical evidence for and against those explanations.
2 See the report by the National Law Center on Homeless and Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless for a list of court cases that have challenged the criminalization of “quality of life” crimes.

Works Cited
FALL 2009 HONORABLE MENTION

Lauren YoungSmith

INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

The essay you are about to read is almost impossible for me to describe—and this is not simply because Lauren YoungSmith's essay is literally about the limitations of a certain kind of description.

No, Lauren’s writing is hard to describe because she has actually invented a new genre of essay—let’s call it a graphic essay, in the same sense that a certain kind of illustrated narrative is called a graphic novel. Here, Lauren YoungSmith will not only argue that language is limited in detailing the lived texture of experience. She will invent a new way of showing it. She will show how academic research and argumentation can be combined with the image, and why this synthesis might make both better at what they want to do.

What can academic argumentation and the image perform together? What are the possibilities of combining research and academic writing, one the one hand, with an artist’s vision and an honest account of how one lives, on the other?

Read this double helix of an essay, and you will see. If I might offer some advice, it would be this: Take your time. This essay is not simply an argument, it is an artwork. And in its slow and mind-bending progression of stories, drawings, examples, and arguments, you may feel something shift in your sense of what the research essay can accomplish—let alone in how you might describe your own life.

This is more than an essay. To me, it is the triumph—and the inevitable deletion—of the college in college writing.

—Scott Herndon
Four Silver Aspen is empty but for one person. It is nearing the end of summer and she is sixteen. As the only member in a household of four who allows herself to sleep in past noon, this girl has been politely left behind for the day’s activities. She moves around the quiet kitchen like a slow fish, idly opening and closing cabinets, shaking off fading dreams. She sits at the dining table near a cluster of boxes pushed up against the white wall—a natural accumulation in a house full of pack rats. The boxes are brown at the edges, almost as if rusted from the perspiration of passing time. In black marker they are labeled “Sue and Pete Court Cases,” each noted with varying years. A combination of boredom and not-fully-alert impulsiveness pricks the girl into motion, a motivation to explore what she’d never had any interest in before.
She kneels to pick through the files, acknowledging a vague notion of duty in her mind, a weak guilt that forever accompanies mention of her father, Peter. A voice that always seems lamely to say, “Ask questions.”

She chooses a random file and opens it, realizing just how little she seems to know about her parents’ business, the practice that tied them together in ways she never witnessed. With increasing curiosity, as if to appropriate all the years she spent avoiding the subject of her father, confronts the papers in her hands. But they offer no understanding, they look back with dark, dense clusters of ink, intimidating in their complexity. The girl has no interest in the legal; she re-files the folder and continues picking through, a little disappointed that this box does not seem to hold some greater understanding of her parents. It’s just a box of court cases, cut and dry pages of history, nothing human at all to them. She reaches for a bigger folder at the far end of the box—more like a portfolio, bound with a heavy textured black material. As she pulls it out, she is conscious to keep her expectations low. The portfolio reminds her of the sketchbook she keeps in her backpack, but there is something very serious about it. The air of legality, maybe. Probably full of nothing, more nothing. She flips open the cover, eyelids heavy, and is momentarily pleased by the presence of pictures before she realizes exactly what this folder is. Everything goes red. Her ribs seem to convulse with the momentum of a physical blow. She stands, hides the folder under her sweater and walks pointedly upstairs to her room. Four Silver Aspen is empty but for one person.

The girl heads straight for her closet, shuts the door and curls up inside a pile of her own clothing. Apprehensively but with the thirst of a mad person, she pulls out the folder and re-opens it slowly. This is the folder, the legal representation of an absence the girl has never been able to characterize, a testament to the fact that her father really was somewhere, sometime. The font labeling the folder is stark, official, boasting the year 1996. The first photo inserted in the plastic sleeve is that of an unintelligible mass of white and red material crumpled against the rock face of a mountain, the mangled ruins of her father’s airplane, looking toy-like and inconsequential in the tiny format of a disposable camera photo. The girl’s eyes are ringed with red, her whole body is pulsing with the fear and horrific thrill of seeing something so entirely off-limits, not just for sixteen-year-olds but for healthy, sane humans, for daughters, for wives. She does not wonder because she knows something must be wrong with her for this feeling, a fascination and a painful obligation, to push on. Looking away is impossible now, the images seem to promise something even if it is destructive. The girl plunges herself into the photos, failing to name each scene for what it is but instead absorbing the scarred landscape and the things it swallowed that day when she was five, letting each photo brand itself upon her mind, knowing that she needs them. Captions sit lowly beneath each monumental photo, each pulsing graphic, explaining with infuriating indifference the contents of each picture.

Front half of wreckage. Debris nearby. The girl breathes deeply, a strange composure comes over her. She holds herself at a tenuous distance, just above the photos, daring herself to enter them. Cockpit of the plane. Strips of skin against the rocks. Eyes dry and red, she flips the page. A piece of victim’s skull near the wreckage. A hot blur. Bits of cloth. Shrapnel. And suddenly, the pain twists, like a thin blade in her ribs. Victim’s shoe. Tears form with startling militancy as all tethers are cut and she plummets. Her father’s shoe, still polished, brown and innocent among all of it, somehow more wrenching than any
violence. A shoe, just as her father had worn it, alongside the pieces that no longer resemble anything human. But it is not the image that provokes such a strange rage in the girl's stomach, it is the utter inadequacy of these labels, the monstrous intent with which these words have tried to flatten and control the most wildly incalculable images one girl could ever encounter. *Victim's shoe.* In this moment, the relationship between image and word is violently broken—the photo transgresses so far beyond the descriptive capacity of words that it utterly belittles language. She is bewildered by the betrayal this folder seems to have committed—she can neither describe nor hope to portray through art the complex whirlwind of emotions kicked up by this portfolio, the violent account of her father as he died in January the year she turned five.

Ever since discovering that portfolio of my father’s plane crash, I have never ceased trying to understand the terrifying force of an imbalance between the word and image. Not only did those photos convince me of the raw power letters and lines hold when they become deeply imbalanced but they also posed the question of what I could do, what sort of artist and monster I could become by learning to channel that power. And, perhaps as some subconscious reaction to this event, I have become a creature of word and image—sometimes an artist, sometimes a writer, but always some kind of knot, the mark of a struggle strung between the two. My father’s folder represents a compass by which one may navigate the complex rhetorical interplay between text and image. It also illuminates the generative power of the tension between the two. That flame of outrage in my chest at discovering photos of my father’s dead body signals the key to both offending and inspiring—a precious rhetorical weapon that could be conceived only in the most unsacred of places.

Given the deep imbalance between images and their verbal complements, the ability to recognize and generate tensions between the two is essential in navigating the aesthetic world—more often than not, it is this ability that we call “artistic intelligence.” One can awaken both love and hatred in the viewer, the way we hate Rauschenberg for erasing de Kooning’s portrait and passing it off as art but love that he had the cheek to do it. The way my ex-boyfriend only likes movies that make him doubt himself as an artist. I envision him groping for words to describe Park Chan-wook’s *Oldboy* and coming up empty, unable to allot words to the movie’s visual glory, drunk on the imbalance. De Kooning and Rauschenberg considered to the erasure piece as “the rude parodic squawk in the temple of art”—a defilation of the perception of art as some exalted, perfectionist practice. These timeless artists call for us all to squawk, to shudder and stumble as I did.
when I opened that folder, to experience not the hallowed halls of art but the graffiti outside, the drawings in the bathroom.

I have learned, in my short time of squawking, that the artistry of channeling word and image is found in the attempt rather than the success. There is no manual to being an artist. Therefore, I make no guarantees with this paper—instead, much like I do when painting, I will build up a number of layers in careless faith that something beautiful will result. I will layer my own studies of graphic novels, movies, theoretical essays, tattooing, personal experiments and artwork, in an attempt to lead the reader along the trajectory whose momentum generates artistic intelligence, or *duende*. I hope to define a kind of rhetorical guide to an aesthetic world, a map by which to understand how art and word work together to communicate. I hope not to soothe or close my wounds but to preserve and paint them. I plan to paper cut, to wound you, in hopes that you might find art in the red of your own imbalance. And in this embodied rhetoric, I want to draw you in.

Chapter II: The Net

Some may argue that words are terribly specific, whereas images have the ability communicate an infinite spectrum of ideas. Images catalyze the entire store of associations that grows and elaborates as a result of the motion of living. We are accumulative beings, capable of refining our sense of association as minds develop and humans experience—thus, the image activates varying strings of associations for each individual. Some religious texts employ the aid of illustrations to enhance the meaning of the words, yet their effects differ. Children’s books attempt to communicate the rudimentary relationship between the picture of a dog and the word that describes it. In *The Utrecht Psalter*, an illustrated religious manuscript from the ninth century, illustrations are meant to “evoke the words, to redouble or reinforce their meaning”—an instance in which the images serve to inform the words in a very straightforward and ironed out manner. While a clear balance exists between the two—the illustrations obviously depict images from the text—aesthetic balance does not necessarily stop at easy association.

The word and the image must work together but it may not immediately—nor ever—be obvious exactly how. A peer-reviewed journal on *The Luttrell Psalter* states that, “On a spectrum of text-image relationships, nothing could seem more opposite… than the mode of illustration in *The Utrecht Psalter* and that of marginal illustration in Gothic manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (Sandler 87). It is between these two psalters that one may examine the shift from aesthetic balance to deep imbalance between words and images, and controversy is often the result of such a shift. The journal explains that *The Luttrell Psalter*, perhaps the most divisive of the thirteenth and fourteenth century illustrated psalters, strikes “the post-medieval mentality as amazing perversions of the ‘real’ meaning of words” (Sandler 87). The words threaten to buckle beneath the strangeness of these images, to lose their godly force to the seductive curve of a monster’s wing and the question it its eyes.
Modern religious critics see The Luttrel Psalter’s marginal illustrations as distracting and even sacrilegious. Saint Bernard asked, “What profit is there in those ridiculous monsters... to what purpose are those unclean apes... those fighting knights” in the illustration, and argued that they could perhaps “turn the monk from his proper meditation on the law of God” (Sandler 87). Saint Bernard argues for the imbalance of text and word—the same frightening imbalance committed by the photos in my father’s folder—however, perhaps The Luttrel Psalter holds the key to heightened artistic intelligence. Text and image should not necessarily yield an obvious connection—it could be in the enigmatic energy between the two that we find art.

“How much greater, then, the potential danger of marginal illustrations in prayer books, adjacent to the sacred words themselves” argues the journal’s commentary on The Luttrel Psalter (Sandler 87). Yet to me it seems that the incongruity between the image and the word is not a pitfall—the strangeness of the psalter makes it beautiful. The tension between the words and images threatens to unsettle the very stability of religious belief. Can you imagine, an army of inked creatures, knights and men dragging down the edges of God’s clouds just by nearing His words? The fear caused by whichever religious man who placed these inexplicable monsters so thoughtfully among the purest of words is enough to shake the heavens. I recognize the same raw power of my dad’s photos in The Luttrel Psalter, a sign that both pieces of media are part of a pool of images that define the rhetoric of powerful artwork. When the tension between an image and its textual counterpart are able to evoke some emotional response—usually for reasons the viewer does not immediately understand—it seems that that is the moment in which art occurs.

In an attempt to visualize how people see and process art, I came up with the concept of “the net.” To illustrate “the net,” I conducted a simple experiment that tested how the subject naturally related words and images in his head. You can—and will—take part in the same experiment right now as I explain it. Let us begin, for instance, with the above drawing. Now, consider the image. Think about it for a moment.
What is it? What does it remind you of? What might it mean to you? As the simple image begins to trigger your own personalized associations, imagine each association as a link in a web that extends out from your head.

Perhaps note each step you take away from the image. As the web elongates and accumulates, each link will become successively less graphic, spreading out, abstracting and complicating. As these associations—links in the growing web—delve deeper into the stores of your own personal experiences, where our own personal complexes of associations reside, you may recognize the need to explain rather than represent your links. I showed a subject named Sidd this same image and asked him to explain each successive association he made as he considered the image. The sequence went like this:

The link on which we chose to stop has elements of imagery—a comic book and its hazy panels, tapioca, but the full memory seems much more accurately harnessed through word. It is as if we have placed our index finger at the original site—a basketball hoop—and drawn it across the spectrum from image to word, scaling the entire range in one go. In theory, the final link is a series of words you have generated to comprise one image, the building blocks of a more personalized representation of the basketball hoop.
Now, try to whittle that final link down to one word. You may have immediately associated the original image with a word, and then proceeded to expand your web from there, but do not choose that word. Where does this experience truly find its core? You’ve been vaulted from the original image, slung from one simple ambivalent object deep into the recesses of increasingly personal associations. Where, then, do you land? The question is not what the image means to you, it is instead, where does it bring you?

Sidd was unable to choose a specific word from his description of the Tintin comic. “If I had to generalize that memory in one word, it would have to be something like ‘nostalgia,’” he says. “It isn’t enough to choose something like ‘comic’ or ‘tapioca.’” I thought this was beautiful. The fact that Sidd experienced something emotional as a result of one simple, detached image—the distinctly emotional sensation of nostalgia, the unwillingness to force that memory down into one word—demonstrates, at its basest level, the purpose of art itself. To make precious something banal. Between the bare image of a basketball hoop and its textual counterpart, “that one Tintin comic that had something to do with tapioca farming that I used to read every night before going to bed,” an imbalance has naturally arisen. This story is worth more to Sidd than the simple idea of a basketball hoop because he himself, his memory, has become a player in the equation. He has added his own weight to the words, tipping the scales.

An image unearths a series of very personal words, words that move, and all from a simple drawing. I worry that I may not have the right to call myself an artist if my work doesn’t horrify or move, if it isn’t precious to anyone. I wonder if perhaps one could learn to recognize that scale, visualize the web and the transition from word to image and back, would he then be an artist, in any sense of the word? Is the rhetoric of artistry the key to touching people? To be able to manipulate—balance and imbalance—the roles of word and image in their communication might afford an individual what I have referred to as “artistic intelligence.” Similar to the idea of emotional intelligence—defined as a self-perceived ability to identify, assess, and manage the emotions of one’s self, of others, and of groups—artistic intelligence instead refers to the ability to recognize and assess aesthetic value as well as generate and imbibe all aspects of life with it. Artistic intelligence does not necessitate artistic skills, it merely requires that all areas of life be considered and understood through a creative lens. The aesthetic plays such a massive role in human life—cave drawings from prehistoric times are evidence of the natural creative impulse—that I firmly believe an understanding of art’s role in relationships and life would amplify not only perception but also the very quality of life. The question is, then, is artistic intelligence even plausible, and if so, and how can it be attained? Let’s examine another instance of everyday life where artistry comes into play.

To understand another individual and create relationships, it seems that we must master the art of portraiture, and learn to translate the other person into a complex of
words and images. In watching people, I’ve noticed that those who understand and interact with people with greater ease are those who can easily put into words a person’s characteristics and mannerisms, categorize them and describe them, and therefore, better understand them. This is one skill we seem to naturally develop as humans, given that speech is widely necessary to interact with human life, and in the act of speaking we hone our abilities to describe and categorize. However, those who truly understand other people are those who recognize the descriptors versus images—an individual’s visual appearance, their palette, the tone they cast as an image. He will conceptualize a snapshot of the individual cocking her head, as she might do habitually, or her composition, as in posture or air. An individual with artistic intelligence would theoretically be able to differentiate these images with their descriptors, identify the links between the two and the merits of each part separately.

One way to recognize a human possessing of artistic intelligence is to examine their skill in creation, which could consist of a simple description of a person. When someone—let’s call her Beth—can accurately and vividly describe something or someone else—we’ll call him Max—they expose themselves to be perceptive, intelligent and well spoken. Say Beth describes Max as “thin, irreverent, dark and wildly intelligent.” Beth is choosing good words by which we may understand a specific image. However, Beth can still go one step further. If Beth can not only explain but illustrate Max in an inventive, artistic way, well then she will far outshine the perceptive ones at a party. By explaining Max as “a young Machiavellian Bob Dylan,” Beth not only illustrates the person in representational form, but she also translates him with flourishes and stylization that makes vivid not only the individual’s appearance but also his personality. There is art in the word. Beth can paint a crisp, accurate portrait. That in itself is a great accomplishment. But Beth’s work is in the galleries because she translates and describes through her own artistic lens; she transcends the fetters of realism and defines her own brand of impressionism.

However, one could far outshine Beth. If the artistically intelligent is one who can understand another human as a careful balance of words and images, then the artist is able to explain the other with equal skill in both speech and graphics. If you were to approach the artistically intelligent human and ask him, “what’s Kimi like?” he should be
able to portray both Kimi and her personality in graphic form. He should have the choice either to describe Kimi or to show you a photograph he took, or make you a drawing that captures Kimi both with accuracy and stylistic flair—either way, you will come to the same understanding of Kimi. He has mastered the study and practice of word and image, able to identify the weight and role of each while simultaneously causing them to interact and communicate as one. Once he can wield both the word and the image with equal strength in either hand, that is when he may effect an imbalance—shock, frighten, provoke, inspire.

As I discovered in doing my research, there is a massive pool of media—artworks, writing, people, places—that we must examine to understand the nature of effective artistry. The way these specific media sites communicate to people is a kind of rhetoric, and it is my goal to illustrate this rhetoric. Bear with me as I move from site to site, for the accumulation of evidence is necessary to the wholeness of this paper.

Chapter III: The Angel and The Muse

Federico García Lorca has another word for this “artistic intelligence”—duende. Lorca’s rhetoric divides the geometry of the world into a trio, an interaction between word, image and body. “I have raised three arches,” Lorca says, “and with clumsy hand have placed in them the angel, the muse, and the duende” (61). Lorca’s duende seems to mark the height of art and of life—he says that duende “is not a question of ability, but of true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation” (49). He calls for a collaboration between the angel and the muse to produce duende—just as man must allow the word and image to communicate in order to generate artistic intelligence. And once a man has erected his triangle, balanced carefully his muse and his angel, then revolution occurs. As I will go on to argue, the duende surfaces from an imbalance of either muse or angel—one may weigh in more heavily than the other, causing the trio to tip. One must throw himself into the revolutions of the spinning shape and from that cyclone will rise the duende.

Lorca’s angel “dazzles, but he flies over a man’s head” (Lorca 50)—implying the spectacle and visual beauty of the angel’s image on the ceilings of chapels and in symbolism. Thus, the angel embodies image. “The muse,” on the other hand, “dictates and sometimes prompts,” presiding over language, embodying word. But Lorca also recognizes the helplessness of either without a human subject to inspire or provoke, a
channel through which to create. He contests that “The muse and the angel come from outside us…. But one must awaken the duende in the remotest mansions of the blood” (51).

The muse and the angel are external forces and therefore inutile until we ingest them and set them in motion, catalyzing duende. Duende is not for the artist who may paint an angel or write a poem, for then the artist is still but an artist who may reach and scratch at both word and image. It seems that duende comes when the artist throws himself into the stew; that he himself is the final ingredient that yields artistic intelligence. Thus, the angel and the muse—the word and the image—require a body and mind to ignite. Thus, when the artist paints an angel he also writes a poem; he is at once an angel, a poem, a man.

I believe that duende is a rare occurrence. An individual possessing artistic intelligence may be entirely a myth, since duende by definition is fleeting—“spontaneous creation”—and therefore may never truly be harnessed. But there are those who make paintings with words, and those who communicate volumes through paintings. There is an unmistakable trade in relationships here: the word informs the image and vice versa. That spectrum is widely recognized and understood; yet I will argue that this relationship is not merely linear. We ourselves stand at angles with the two, effectively composing a peak to the shape. Draw a line between the three points, between the arches, and we become the peak of a triangle—humans, and their bodies, inform word and speak to image. In motion, the three generate a cycle of information and inspiration. We as people, our bodies, are duende in its arch—flanked by the muse and the angel. Duende is perhaps a force of geometry, the spontaneous creation and agitation of a triangle that defines our lives as humans and artists. The aesthetic life, then, is an act of triangulation.

Chapter IV: The Triangle

Nagiko: “How can I get pleasure writing on you?
You have to write on me.”

-The Pillow Book

To diagnose the rhetorical world merely in terms of the tension between text and image would be to flatten it. Neither exists on it own—a poem takes shape against the form of the poet from whence it came; a drawing speaks because it reflects the movement of human eyes—none of this is artificially produced. One understands that
the language and visual arts are distinctly human practices, yet allow me to take this one step further—involve the body directly, not just the human psyche, the human touch. What becomes of the word or the image when it is displayed upon the body, translated directly through the body? Living among humans necessitates an understanding that the body itself speaks; thus, love.ivillage.com posts an article claiming to “decode” celebrity couples by reading their body language. The celebrity expert assesses a photo of Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise, asserting that “Katie’s trying to convince us that this is true lurve with that toothy, over exaggerated grin” (Cox, iVillage.com). Even sources least concerned with artistry recognize the relationship between the body, its image and the verbal message it conveys.

According to iVillage, Katie Holmes’ triangle consists of these three points: Katie (the person), “toothy smile” (image), “true lurve” (word, or verbal meaning). The celebrity body language expert implies that Katie has channeled the idea of the image by portraying herself as overly happy, thus leading to the conclusion that her toothy smile is meant to verbalize “lurve.” However, iVillage notes sadly that her smile “just seems forced” (Cox, iVillage.com). The “over exaggerated grin” outweighs Katie’s intended message—she has committed an imbalance, and not a good one. With this scathing commentary, iVillage notes that Katie has mistreated her angel and her muse, failing miserably to reach duende.

But someone else in Hollywood is getting close. While body language stays cloistered in the realm of the image—text and word still floating invisible at its point of the triangle—Angelina Jolie seems to have taken the advice of her muse and chosen to project language in a much more tangible, violent way. The subject of dozens of celebrity gossip websites, her collection of tattoos gains almost as much attention as the star herself. Woodenspears.com writes, “Angelina Jolie tattoos are probably as interesting as the star herself. Every tattoo tells a story, every artwork has a secret – how can a tattoo
get? The super star is probably known for her superb interesting body work” (“Wooden Spears,” woodenspears.com). Tattoosdaily.com—tailored to tattoo aficionados—writes that “Her collection of inks [sic] not just because their [sic] beautiful either. Each of her many tattoos has a special symbolism behind it. This list is just the tip of the iceberg, but it does give you a peek into the personality, thinking, and style of this popular actress” (administrator, tattoosdaily.com). Aside from bad grammar and spelling, the websites have in common the sentiment that Jolie’s tattoos embody her personality and perhaps even work to speak for her.

Boasting a number of sayings in many different languages, runes, the coordinates of all her children’s births, a tiger to represent her Cambodian citizenship and many more, Jolie appears not only as a lovely human image but also with a series of beautiful and enigmatic textual complements. Jolie has make both a work of art and a book of herself, yet her duende does not necessarily lie in the content of her tattoos—it lies in her fame. Angelina Jolie has managed to gain a reputation as a respected and talented actress while covered in tattoos; in fact, her tattoos somehow amplify her prestige. While tattoos are traditionally seen as emblems of a marginal society, sometimes even mutilation, Jolie has managed to speak with her tattoos in a way the quiet persona of a more modest celebrity couldn’t be expected to. As one writer from masterofink.com says, “Personally I’d like to see her cover her body with ink. I think that would just make her look hotter than she already is, if that is even possible” (administrator, masterofink.com).

Chapter V: The Act of Triangulation

The flash of a Spanish verb pressed neatly into the small of a girl’s ankle communicates little to no meaning at face value. Instead of the immediate associations conveyed by graphics—❤ means love, ⌚ means time—the word offers up no outlines; its bareness communicates merely the necessity of further explanation.

“Sonar…” the questioner will read slowly while the girl impatiently bares her ankle. “Soñar,” she will correct. “It means ‘to dream’ in Spanish.” The questioner will nod his head as if all were made immediately clear, vague notions of popular poeticism and flimsy romantic ideals budding like little speech bubbles to accompany the image of her ankle. “Ohh,” murmurs the questioner unconvincingly, while the girl quickly stows away her ankle and changes the subject to avoid the obvious lack of explanation. In the questioner’s mind, the girl’s tattoo will most likely join the misfit ranks of the many seemingly “insignificant,” “pointless” and even “stupid” tattoos that appear to proliferate as the tattooing subculture seems to break up through the floor and assimilate with culture aboveground. What the questioner experiences then is the betrayal of word without image—equally as bewildering as only the betrayal of image without word. When the natural union of image and text is halved, we jump to reunite—this is called an “orange,” the word “orange” conjures an image of this fruit. But when a word confronts us on its own, in a format so permanent and isolated as a tattoo on an
otherwise unmarked body, something snaps and begins to feel lost.

“Soñar” translates and enunciates, yet it does not seem to conjure. All around, the marriage of names and their owners quickly becomes enigmatic—which half needs the other, or is either better off alone? The painter displays her collection without an artist’s statement, the author publishes without illustrations, and yet graphic novelists set out with rulers, brushes and keyboards to both mediate and inflame the joints between word and image—fueling the rise of the most exciting new art form of the twenty-first century. And yet Perceval reaches revelation, entering into true being, only when he discovers and speaks his own name. This most important of all descriptors rises and hastens to crown all of the infinite words which will now begin to describe Perceval, the way an artist’s charcoal describes a face, and the joints of text and graphics seem to sigh as words are finally put to the image of man.

The relationship of word and image is not strictly an affair of two dimensions—there resides a distinctly human element in this tension. Image—personal image, body image—concerns us as equally as does reputation, label, title. Just as an artist may describe with lines and a poet may paint with words, living is an exercise in painting and describing ourselves. We are ourselves shifting images, bound up with an inescapable orbit of words. The factor which truly defines individuals from another is how each of us chooses to weigh our values of image and word—perhaps vapid celebrities can be said to prefer a valuable image over descriptors, effectively marginalizing the text beneath a monumental, glittering figure. Beyond the metaphor of reputation as text and body as image, there also exists a very literal relationship between body and text. In Greenaway’s film The Pillow Book, a young Japanese woman named Nagiko grows up under the understanding of humans as books. Even the film itself struggles to reconcile the conflict of image and text—subtitles, song lyrics and Japanese characters arrive to accompany and refute scenes of Nagiko’s father painting words on her face, Nagiko sending men covered in characters as books to a publisher, Nagiko expressing her love with a brush against her lover Jerome’s chest.

Fig. 1. Still image from The Pillow Book, directed by Peter Greenaway. http://likeawhisper.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/pillowbook.jpg

In an article from The San Francisco Chronicle, a journalist opens his article with a scene where a poet searches “literary tattoos” on his laptop and “Then, with a sharp
shock… stops scrolling. He has come upon his own words, inked on skin” (Benson, sfgate.com). The proliferation of text tattoos is evidence of the growing need to describe our own images, and to really mean it, permanently. The body emerges as a modern day scroll, our own palettes on which to communicate when invisible titles and temporary appearances do not suffice. After Nagiko’s lover displays himself to the editor as “The Book of the Dead,” naked and adorned in Nagiko’s calligraphy, he commits suicide and is flayed and made into a true book. In the final scene of the film, Nagiko pulls down her robe to breastfeed Jerome’s child, revealing an extensive body tattoo of Japanese words. The world is woven of words and images, thus the true task of a human lies in pacifying or provoking this relationship. By allowing art and word to be part of us, we triangulate. In this age, the body is the battlefield—words and images must war, and the fallout is often quite lovely.

If the questioner were to recognize the girl’s ankle as a sheaf of paper rather than some slate off of which meaning slides and dies, perhaps he might have recognized the great image blooming like spreading watercolors from her ankle. Perhaps if she had plucked “soñar” from her ankle and strung it back up with the rest of the words, the string of poetry from Antonio Machado, perhaps the questioner would have understood the word to be not an isolated half but rather the title of a painting, the crown descriptor of the girl sitting in front of him. Perhaps, if she had taken the time to enunciate how, according to Machado, “entre el vivir y el soñar, hay una tercera cosa”—between living and dreaming there is a third thing—then the questioner might have learned Machado’s final advice: “Adivínala,” “Guess it” (Machado). Perhaps then, the girl may have conjured the image of a boy across the country whose ankle bears the word “vivir,” and whose image grows to become the living to the girl’s dreaming. Perhaps, then, the girl and the questioner could have put their heads together and gazed at these two images as they stood at opposite coasts and simply spent the evening guessing what might be between, what lives in the twilight world of word and image, human and book, the intersection between “soñar” and “vivir.”

Perhaps the “image”—the human—is greater than a text tattoo, and it is that imbalance which reflects the feeling of betrayal caused by the legal records I found in that box when I was sixteen. In an attempt to level the playing field, we often attempt to assign words to ourselves—a running narration. The Stanford University Undergraduate Application asks the applicant to “describe yourself using five words.” The applicant moans, and gropes for some five perfect words with which to portray the great extent of their ability and personality, yet both Stanford and the applicant know that there is such thing as an impossible task. Apply your artistic intelligence; employ the five perfect tools to paint an accurate and vibrant image of you as a human and an individual. With that short-answer question, Stanford seeks to measure a student’s artistic intelligence, and their ability to balance word with the image he means to project.

Current college applications have risen to the challenge of evaluating applicants based on their merit in spheres outside of mere test scores and GPAs—applications now attempt to measure a student’s understanding of the world, their intellectual vitality and their drive to learn versus bust out good grades. This phenomenon marks a change in our attitude towards merit—the greatest institutions in this world have chosen to recognize the most promising young citizens not by mere scholarly intelligence but by their heart, their understanding of an aesthetic world, their artistic intelligence, and their ability to
triangulate without having any idea what it means to do so.

The search to achieve artistic intelligence is pursued no more fiercely by than anyone but graphic novelists. Both Rene Magritte’s “The Treachery of Images” and Joseph Kosuth’s “One and Three Chairs,” explore the same kind of betrayal exposed by the black portfolio—a distortion in the balance between an object and its verbal reference. Take Magritte’s “The Treachery of Images”:

\[\text{Leci n'est pas une pipe.}\]


The text translates to “This is not a pipe.” With elegant surrealist brevity, Magritte implies that there is some disconnect in the translation from reality to image—while the painting depicts a pipe, the painting cannot truly be said to be a pipe. Magritte laughs, “The famous pipe. How people reproached me for it!... it's just a representation, is it not? So if I had written on my picture ‘This is a pipe,' I’d have been lying!” (Magritte, Wikipedia) Kosuth's piece consists of a chair, a photograph of this chair, and an enlarged dictionary definition of the word “chair.”

**Fig. 3.** Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs. [http://www.post.thing.net/files/images/kosuth-chair1-english-1965.preview.jpg](http://www.post.thing.net/files/images/kosuth-chair1-english-1965.preview.jpg)

Kosuth argues for the unification of concept and realization—he implies that word and image are the same. The outcry against these works of art—for critics have argued
that Magritte and Kosuth both violate certain terms of art—is evidence of their skillful manipulation of the tension between text and image. Magritte and Kosuth are working on their own squawks. Though these are quite obvious experiments with the tension, all art deals in some way with image and its referents. It is the moment when the work done provokes or upsets that the artist has struck an imbalance that holds power.

Artists like Magritte and Kosuth make statements about the strange spaces between image and word, yet their work still lies in the realm of commentary. These conceptual artists do not pull out the weights with such involvement and vigor as the graphic novelists—those who actually harness this tension and wield it with great skill. Graphic novels, now upheld as a legitimate and perhaps transcendental art form, explore the exact balance between text and graphics. These are books that emanate almost the same aesthetic and visual value as a movie, providing incredibly intricate balances to uphold a continual storyline that both looks and reads like substantial movies and novels.

In Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, a comic book about writing comic books, the panels depict a little boy presenting a robot toy for show and tell. He struggles to explain the toy through interchangeable means—explaining, then showing, then explaining. McCloud’s narrator jumps in to say, “We all started out like this, didn’t we? Using words and images interchangeably... it’s considered normal in this society for children to combine words and pictures, so long as they grow out of it” (McCloud 139). Like Scott McCloud, I hardly believe in this notion. With more than a hint of sarcasm, McCloud refutes the societal expectations that we grow to use language almost exclusively and devalue the role of images in our everyday lives; yet through my research I have discovered that people utilize the image no matter how hard they may try not to. People like Scott McCloud have harnessed the power of black ink—the few small differences between the curve of a letter and the outline of an eye—and achieved something nearing artistic perfection.

Chapter VI: The Closing

Two years later, I don’t quite know where I am. I have shared the story of my dad’s folder with close to no one. I feel marked by the incident but not scarred. I think going into this paper that I understood there would be some sort of translation in action from writing the first page to the last. By wiping these memories into the paper I felt as if I was capturing ghosts, the cloudy imprints of each photo as they moved around me, and laying them to writhe and glow where I could finally see them. Nothing is dismissed, and I have not moved on, but the ghosts have translated from a cloud of fearfulness to the specter of a triangle, a map with which I could perhaps navigate the realm of human emotion. Taking my place in the triangle, between the angel of my father’s body and the muse of its caption, I think I can recognize pain now as intelligence, and those things that hurt most as art. The red throb of finding my father’s body too insubstantially described by faulty captions has not faded, but rather triangulated. I do not pretend to offer the therapeutic answer to any horrific experience, but I venture only to say that there is a shape, a face, a way of catching hold of what you fear and what haunts you. There are symbols that we choose to act as receptacles for our prayers and swears, objects in which we find guidance or comfort. For some it is a cross, a bird, an upturned hand. For me it is a triangle.

As Lorca says, “the true fight is with the duende” (51). I feel more often that I
am grappling with my artwork and writing rather than coexisting. As I crack open my sketchbook, I imagine poising myself to reach up and grasp my angel’s ankle, yank her down and wage myself a war. Amongst the fallout, under the debris—that is from where duende will call. I don’t believe I’d grow as an artist or a human without the ability to recognize the horrific beauty or strange fury in the things that change me. Thus, I believe that this paper itself has somehow allowed me to exact the motions of triangulation. However, it leaves much to be desired—as a work of artistic intelligence, it should consist of much more than just talk. But so the weights continue to tremble and tip.

I have wiped away the red behind my sixteen-year-old eyes and found that that summer day is not so hard to return to. It comes to me now without the twist of a knife but on the heels of a muse, an angel. Maybe that folder was none other than duende printed and bound, heavy in my young palms. Lorca says that “there are neither maps nor exercises to help us find the duende”—and for that reason, I now dismantle the triangle” (S1). We only know that he burns the blood… that he exhausts, that he rejects all the sweet geometry we have learned… that he leans on human paint with no consolation” (Lorca S1). Lorca says that in the act of defining the triangle I must also necessarily destroy it—there is no geometry in art, there is only the search for it. Listen, your angel and muse may be cooing for you to set this essay on fire, for you might be justified in doing so. Stoke the bonfire with basketball hoops, psalters, wooden pipes, the inked skin of some celebrity. The peak of the shape becomes a pyre, and from it the duende rises. The triangle works as a guide for only as long as it takes to follow it—and upon closing in on the final point, we end not with a map but with an empty space. A window through which to step back into the blankness, to begin again. So I invite you to reject the “sweet geometry” that I have fabricated and exhausted, and turn to your own “human paint.” Smear yourself across the page. Open up the rusted boxes in your kitchen and succumb to the red fear that feeds our angels and our muses. Draw some shapes of your own.

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Illustrations by Lauren YoungSmith, 2009.
In the essay you are about to read, Kris Sankaran observes that, “the power of theater emerges from its ability to engage those from dramatically different contexts.” In the spirit of adaptation, which is Kris’s subject, I would say that the power of this essay emerges from Kris’s ability to engage dramatically different contexts and his ability to bring these contexts into conversation with one another.

Either of the two adaptations that Kris chose to analyze would have provided enough material for a fascinating essay. After all, one of the texts that the essay engages with is, as Kris points out when introducing it, fifteen times longer than the Bible. It was, however, to the benefit of his argument that he ultimately decided to study cross-cultural theatrical adaptation from both sides of the equation. He organized his essay around a production of a well-known play by an English playwright in the style of a traditional Indian performance and an English theatrical adaptation of an important Indian religious text. Juxtaposing an English dramatization of the Mahabharata and a Kathakali production of King Lear helped Kris arrive at an appropriately complex understanding of both the dangers and the opportunities of cultural interchange. In its consideration of different examples of and viewpoints towards cultural interchange, Kris’s essay itself becomes a dramatic text.

“Theater between Borders: Navigating Culture in an Interconnected World” thus attains a relevance that far transcends the particular theatrical productions with which the essay is concerned. In taking on the question of the ethics of cultural adaptation in an interconnected world, Kris speaks to a wide and diverse audience indeed.

—Ema Vyroubalova
Theater between Borders: Navigating Culture in an Interconnected World

Kris Sanharan

It is a drama of vast scope, a story of dynastic turmoil that escalates, via a myriad of journeys, conspiracies, and miracles, into an apocalyptic battle, a cosmic struggle between men, demons, and gods, culminating in a divine force's active intervention in the sun's movement in order to lead the epic's heroes to ultimate victory. This narrative, the *Mahabharata*, which forms the philosophical basis for a major world religion, Hinduism, has been relayed from generation to generation for over two millennia, but in the summer of 1985 at the Avignon Theater Festival, an audience witnessed a retelling of this story through an entirely new medium—the Western theatrical tradition. This adaptation of the massive Indian epic, a work fifteen times longer than the Bible, was completed by dramatists Peter Brook and Jean-Claude Carrière over the course of ten years, and the result was a nine-hour production that immediately generated much critical acclaim. However, before long, the production came under fierce attack by numerous Indian theater and cultural scholars, who accused the production of rampant Orientalism and the misappropriation of a sacred text. The international discourse regarding Brook's production became steeped in hostility, reactionary nationalism, stereotyping, and cultural misunderstanding.

Fifteen years later at the Globe Theater in London, the violent, chaotic, and tragic story of Shakespeare's *King Lear* was performed in a way that it had never been before. As in any performance of the play, King Lear disowns his pure daughter Cordelia after she, unlike her wicked sisters Goneril and Regan, fails to flatter him. However, Lear soon realizes his mistakes; he discovers that Goneril and Regan have begun conspiring to subvert his authority. Eventually he descends into madness while wandering through the countryside during a thunderstorm, a setting that in many ways mirrors that of the *Mahabharata*—a prehistoric land of vast, incomprehensible, elemental powers. However, this 1999 performance at the Globe was markedly different from previous interpretations. The Keli Dance Company was staging the drama in Kathakali, a dance and dramatic tradition with roots in Kerala, India, that state from which Keli Dance originally hails. As with Brook's *Mahabharata*, reviews were sharply divided—some felt that they had gained insight through the cross-cultural dialogue, others thought the essence of both Shakespeare and Kathakali was diluted, thus rendering the performance devoid of meaning. The theater community has yet to establish a consensus on the dramatic power and effectiveness of *Kathakali King Lear*, which is just one of the many productions to have emerged over the last thirty years that fuses Indian and Western traditions.

Though superficially similar, Peter Brook's adaptation of an Indian epic poem, the
Mahabharata, and the Keli Dance Company’s performance of Shakespeare’s King Lear via the classical Indian dramatic genre Kathakali reflect deeply divergent methods and understandings. Both communicated enduring tales through an unorthodox medium, and each provoked audiences to consider the universality of human emotion and artistic passion by presenting unconventional readings—indeed, both stimulated much debate among audiences. Some viewed the productions as landmarks of cross-cultural appreciation; others denounced the trivialization and misrepresentation of deeply-held societal and aesthetic traditions. However, in artistic vision and in actual execution, the two performances could not be more different. It is a goal of this paper to explore these differences and illuminate a vision of intercultural exchange in theater where diverse cultures respect one another’s traditions and foster a greater understanding of the universal human experience.

The numerous changes that globalization has catalyzed have garnered a range of reactions from those in a variety of contexts. The realm of theater is no exception: numerous productions have blurred distinctions between cultures. How have these productions nurtured intercultural dialogue and understanding? Conversely, how have such performances become sources of intercultural offense and alienation? In how many productions is there an element of cultural condescension? How have traditional forms in India and the West benefited and lost from intercultural theater? Any intercultural exchange holds the potential for a variety of consequences: hostility, respect, reactionary nationalism, and mutual understanding are all possible effects of cross-cultural theater. By analyzing past performances, this paper will attempt to identify the causes of these divergent reactions and establish guidelines designed to foster international harmony through theater performance. Though I highlight occasions of cultural misunderstanding, it is not the intention of this paper to incite nationalism among Indians or to breed paranoia among Westerners attempting to participate in international dialogue. Rather, these examples serve to benefit those in intercultural situations by isolating potential hazards, with the hope that they are able to avoid them and promote international understanding. Indeed at the core of this paper’s argument is the principle that when crafted sensitively and with vision, cross-cultural artistic endeavors hold the potential to deepen international relationships and foster not simply acceptance but admiration.

Domination and Subversion in the Colonial Era: A History Fraught with Tension

With the Bengali Theater Censorship Act of 1876, India’s British rulers attempted to limit the expression permitted in native drama, where actions were, in the lawmakers’ words, more likely to have a “much more vivid effect” than “any other sort of publication,” and censors made efforts to preempt any future attempts to satirize or in any other way challenge British authority through theater (Bhatia 6). In the colonial era, both Indian activists and the British establishment recognized the power of theater as a mechanism to influence opinions, and both employed theater to further their objectives. Perhaps more than any other literary or performance genre, the masses—even the illiterate—can identify with drama, with the living, breathing actors on stage, and this mass identification renders drama a powerful means of persuasion. Colonial India is an exemplary case of cultural reality influencing and in turn being influenced by theatrical performances, and though the kind of interaction between cultures that occurred in this
context is far from the modern ideal, the role of theater in this interaction highlights the wide repercussions of societal context on theater as well as the incisive power of the cross-cultural stage.

Inherent in the colonial system are pressures and conflicts that promote misunderstanding and hostility, and intercultural theater during this era reflected and arguably perpetuated these tensions. Beginning with the earliest contact, British colonizers understood that, in order to control the much larger Indian population, they could not simply forcibly impose obedience; they would have to convince enough Indians of the necessity and positive influence of British intervention. Accounts of British paternalism and the “white man’s burden,” the responsibility of civilizing unenlightened regions of the world, became standard fare in nineteenth-century India. The domain of theater was no exception to this practice, and the British colonizers justified their authority by asserting the superiority of British literature and drama. Representative of these sentiments, British Prime Minister Thomas Babington Macaulay asserted that a purpose of the British colonization of India was to create a social class “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (Macaulay 430).

In particular, Shakespeare was apotheosized by the British in India, and his being embraced by the populace reflects the degree to which authorities affected the Indian cultural lens, reinforcing Western domination; this episode underscores the power that theater holds in cross-cultural contexts. Once the British mandated that Shakespeare was to be included, right alongside mathematics and writing, on governmental exams, generations of Indians began focusing parts of their education—some would argue indoctrination—on the plays of Shakespeare. Reflecting the extent of educated Indians’ adoration of Shakespeare, one contemporary native scholar described Kalidasa, arguably the greatest ancient Sanskrit dramatist, as “the Indian Shakespeare” (Bhatia 66). It was this class of educated Indians that aided the British in their control of India; without them, even a sizable British presence would not have been able to maintain such a firm grip on the expansive and populous nation. In this situation, intercultural theater elevated the status of one culture over another; theater profoundly impacted the relationship between India and the West. Partly due to theater and British promises of cultural progress, many Indians submitted to British colonialism. But this process necessarily entailed condescension towards and weakening of traditional genres. Here, intercultural contact resulted in misunderstanding and the loss of traditions; intercultural theater was more destructive than it was constructive.

However, activists and playwrights in India used the same methods of intercultural theater to subvert, rather than reinforce, British imperialism. Indeed, some even fused Shakespearean and traditional forms in their displays of Indian pride and calls for independence. Perhaps the most notable example of this phenomenon is Durlabh Bandhu by Bharatendu Harishchandra, an 1888 drama inspired by Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice that implicitly condemns British involvement in colonial activities and engages its Indian audience in the pro-Independence movement. In the play, Anant (Antonio) loses all his money in a shipwreck and has to borrow money from Shailaksha (Shylock) to help his friend Basant (Bassanio). In the event that his is unable to repay the moneylender, Anant promises to pay Shailaksha with a pound of his flesh. When his ships fail to arrive in time to repay his debts, Anant is obligated to keep his word. Only in court does Anant evade his gruesome fate, for the astute Purushi (Portia) outwits Shailaksha
with her shrewd arguments, demanding that not a drop of blood be lost in the transaction, as it was not part of the written agreement. On a subtler level, the narrative of Durlabh Bandhu is an allegory of imperialist domination and native subversion. Those with authority—the rich Shailaksha in this case—oppress those whom they have power over, only to be outwitted a brilliant, insubordinate Purushi. In this case, the role of theater was not to bridge the differences between the British colonialist and Indian activist perspectives but to assert the validity of a worldview and the sophistication of a culture that were under siege. It was not intended to “promote understanding” between cultures clearly in conflict. Nevertheless, Harishchandra’s work ultimately served to highlight the similarities between seemingly divergent perspectives—by including Shakespeare and a Western format in a play focusing on the sophistication of Indian culture, Durlabh Bandhu underscores themes of oppression and evasion that are universal themes of the human experience. In this way, it is an early exemplar of positive intercultural theater performance.

India’s complex relationship with Shakespeare was the subject of a 1965 film by producer Ismail Merchant and director James Ivory, Shakespeare Wallah—in particular, the film focused on the role of Shakespeare in the years immediately following India’s independence from the British Empire. The film traces the lives and performances of the Buckingham players, a fictional theater company based on the real-life Shakespeareana troupe; in fact, several of the film’s main actors were originally members of Shakespeareana. The group finds itself performing in a variety of contexts, from schoolhouses to elite social clubs to the palaces of a maharaja, and the film highlights the range of receptions the group encounters. Though often praised by elites—whose tastes are visibly influenced by the standards and etiquette of their former British colonizers—the group finds itself abandoned by the general population, which seems more inclined to watch the glamorous movies of the emerging Bollywood industry.

![Fig 1. Scene from Shakespeare Wallah.](image)

The film highlights the interaction between traditions influenced by intercultural forces.

In this way, the film underscores the idea that Shakespeare is not an automatically or universally revered icon. Appreciation of Shakespeare is linked to the power of the British elite to establish Western cultural supremacy; even Shakespeare is incapable of “transcending the ideological and political division” between the former colony and colonizer (Bhatia 169). Many Indians in the film reject Shakespeare as an icon of the
British Raj, catcalling during a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* and preferring movies by native Indians. On the other hand, several of the troupe’s English actors use Shakespeare performance to channel their nostalgia for the British Empire and are upset at the shift in power that accompanies postcolonialism. Their love of Shakespeare seems to be connected to their attachment to the British Empire. Western theater in India is thus inherently linked to colonial British authority.

In a central subplot, a romance develops between Lizzie Buckingham, a Shakespeare performer, and Sanju Rai, an aristocratic Indian. The eventual failure of their romance, even after a passionate courtship, is symbolic of India and England’s inability to reconcile their histories and unite in the aftermath of Indian independence. Indeed, the fact that Sanju rejects Lizzie, rather than the other way around, indicates the dramatic power-reversal that occurred with independence and the degree to which Western ideas were rejected in postcolonial India. In this way, the film captures the role of theater in influencing the dynamic between Indian and English cultures during the aftermath of the India’s independence. The film encapsulates the experience of individuals in an intercultural theater setting, and it symbolizes the profound influence that such a situation has on the reception and interpretation of theater. In the upheaval of decolonization, both British and Indian theater creators and audiences reevaluated long-standing practices, in many cases leading to the rejection of Shakespeare. Thus, as symbolized by *Durlabh Bandhu* and *Shakespeare Wallah*, theatrical performances and international events leave deep imprints on each other. Social changes affect the reactions to theater, and theater in turn reflects and reinforces shifts in cultural perspectives.

**Modern Interculturalism: Confronting Alternate Perspectives**

Part of the power of theater emerges from its ability to engage those from dramatically different contexts; it holds the potential to influence the attitudes and challenge the assumptions of individuals whose perspectives differ widely. Such performances facilitate an encounter of ideas that is associated with both great constructive and destructive potential, and to hope to practice positive intercultural contact, it is often necessary to understand the differing cultural lenses through which individuals view cross-cultural theater.

Contact between India and the West is no new phenomenon—though much popular discourse directs attention to the widespread globalization accompanying modernity, such accounts ignore deep histories of intercultural communication. These histories play a large role in coloring the perspectives of contemporary audiences to intercultural theater. Modern Western liberalism tends to associate communication between various cultures as necessarily positive and dynamic—such contact is viewed as an opportunity to learn from the traditions of others as well as celebrate the universality of the human experience. This attitude is a fixture of cosmopolitanism, a very pervasive and powerful idea in the modern West. Surely, there are those in the West who denounce international exploitation by powerful political and economic organizations, but their frustration tends to be directed more towards impersonal institutions—corporations and governments—rather than cross-cultural artistic endeavors. Indeed, the notion of world fusion in the arts is generally advocated. These attitudes stem from a history in which the West has freely benefited from exposure to international art forms; Van Gogh was famously inspired by Japanese woodcut prints, and Picasso’s Cubism was in part motivated by his...
viewing masks from the Dan region of Africa. Thus, it is a natural assumption among those in the West that cultural exchange is a source of artistic growth.

Conversely, in India, international exchanges and cross-cultural artists are viewed with suspicion, especially among, but not necessarily confined to, traditionalists. Since Indian independence, cultural exchange has come to arouse distrust, even reactionary nationalism; from the perspective of prominent Indian cultural theorist and theater critic Rustom Bharucha, “not every exchange is necessarily dynamic” (Bharucha, Politics 33). Indeed, Indian audiences are especially sensitive to cross-cultural contact that is “coercive or assimilationist, if not blatantly colonial” (Bharucha, Politics 33). This perspective is influenced by centuries of colonial subjugation—a period when culture was regulated by British authority. International exchange has come to be associated with colonialism, with oppression and cultural appropriation. Many Indians, particularly artists, are very sensitive to the suppression of traditional culture by foreign powers, for their history is replete with examples of those with imperial authority censoring and controlling native practices—from repression of traditional drama to requiring knowledge of Shakespeare for governmental job placement exams.

In the eyes of many in India, this kind of exploitation continues today—and it is no surprise, with some credible Western writers asserting that, prior to British colonization, Indian drama was only “a medley of all-too-familiar didactic tales rehashed from the epics and the puranas, a crude potpourri of song, dance, mime, and farce that hardly qualified as legitimate drama” (Frost 93). The same critic disparaged research concerning Westerners’ Orientalism and coercive tendencies as “fashionable” and unnecessary—an opinion clearly disconnected from the realities of history and attitudes in India (Frost 93). The prevailing attitude is that intercultural exchange can result in colonialism, that “the idea and process of cross-cultural contact are not postwar inventions but the essential conditions of colonialism” (Chaudri 157). Those in the West and those in India hold deeply divergent views on the nature of intercultural contact, and these tensions often manifest themselves in reactions to intercultural theater performances. It is important to be familiar with these differing assumptions in any project attempting to appeal to individuals in either culture.

Furthermore, beyond ideological complications, material concerns come into play when analyzing conflicts in cross-cultural exchanges, especially in cases where participants are divided between wealthy and developing nations. Economic incentives have caused what could potentially be intercultural theater experiences to be limited to higher-class venues in particular cultures—undermining the potential of intercultural theater to contribute to art and traditions within multiple cultures. Such decisions are usually motivated by pure financial concerns of theater companies, but it is clear how such behavior can breed resentment across cultures. Instances of selective broadcasting of performances are often linked to accusations that intercultural theater has a colonialist aura—that traditions are being appropriated without any reciprocation. It is critical that performances avoid accusations of cultural tourism or “packaging fragments of exoticized cultures for the consumption of privileged audiences around the world” (Chaudri 38). Accusations of exploitation and misunderstanding are common in intercultural contact; they are what generate so much tension in cross-cultural encounters.

However, though the ideas and assumptions between cultures may conflict, theater creators should not be discouraged from attempting to bridge the divide—indeed, these
tensions make intercultural theater all the more meaningful. It provides an opportunity for individuals to challenge assumptions and thereby obtain greater understanding of other cultures as well as their own. Though it is clear that intercultural theater is a minefield riddled with the unique histories and sensitivities of those in a variety of contexts, the benefit of such dialogue is too great to be ignored. History may contain examples of theater that disrespected other cultures, either through Orientalism, misunderstanding, or bigotry, but such lapses, even if they are more derisive and harmful than mild cultural faux pas, should not be the determining factor for the future of intercultural theater. If carefully crafted, intercultural theater performances will not only preserve the established traditions and cultural richness of those from whom they borrow, they will invigorate those traditions and inspire cross-cultural enthusiasm. Intercultural contact does not automatically generate greater understanding—at times, such contact can be the source of great tension and hostility—however, when conscientiously organized, such exchange may not only facilitate exposure to other attitudes, it may inspire deeper mutual respect between and greater creativity within cultures.

Pitfalls of Intercultural Performance

Peter Brook’s Mahabharata was conceived with the best intentions—a performance to celebrate the multiculturalism of the modern world and to immerse Western audiences in a narrative central to the Hindu experience. In his epic retelling of the ancient Indian narrative—a story of such vast scope and cultural importance that most directors would tremble at the thought of adapting it to the stage—Brook would employ a diverse cast, striking visual effects, and innovative direction. In his preparation for the production, Brook traveled to India to research the subjects he would be transmitting to Western audiences. However, in certain aspects of its theoretical foundation and in its actual execution—ranging from sweeping generalizations in the preface to its failure to inform the audience of certain cultural values in the conclusion—Brook’s production is crucially flawed as intercultural drama, and these few erroneous assumptions and poor decisions came to instigate international antagonism and haunt his Mahabharata.

In order to carefully create and appropriately evaluate cross-cultural theater performances, it is first necessary to be familiar with that which has the potential to alienate and offend in intercultural performances. Poor cross-cultural understanding—a potential pitfall for any individual, even those with the ability to travel and immerse themselves abroad—can preclude the creation of successful intercultural theater performance. Central to assessing the impact of these performances, it is most important to observe the degree of involvement by and the nature of the interaction between the cultures being bridged.

Historically among theater figures, Orientalism and exoticism have rendered any positive cross-cultural theater performances between the West and India impossible. Orientalism tends to highlight the “otherness” of those in foreign cultures, to undermine any potential that art holds to accentuate the universality of aspects of the human experience and to deepen bonds across borders. A hallmark of such Orientalism is the limited inclusion of those from one of the involved cultures. For example, in spite of the multicultural cast of Brook’s Mahabharata, he includes only one Indian performer, actress Mallika Sarabhai as Draupadi, and involves no Indian voices in the play’s conception, writing, and development. Further, he never staged his Mahabharata, a work critical to
modern Indian culture and values, in India; he only ever staged it in Paris and New York. Of course, Brook and his colleagues went to India to research the subject matter of their play, but Carrière, the author of the drama’s script, writes that “wherever we went, we met sages, scholars, villagers, pleased to find foreigners interested in their great epic and generously happy to share their understanding” (Carrière xiv-xv). He writes as if he were an explorer in an exotic foreign land, cut off from any foreign contact, whose welcoming natives reflect the natural pureness of the territory. His description is idealized and completely disconnected from any of modern India’s economic or political woes; such romanticization and selective memory is reflected in his treatment of the Mahabharata, which lacks many culturally important scenes.

Fig. 2. Battle scene from Peter Brook’s Mahabharata. Scenes such as this one suggest an overemphasis on this episode of the Indian epic.

In Brook’s Mahabharata, romanticization of India weakened its potential to contribute to the culture of both India and the West; it was only popular in the West, and even then, it provided an inaccurate view of India and the Mahabharata. Brook’s rhetoric surrounding his travels to India reveals a disconnection from modern India and a fixation upon “classical, devotional, and folk traditions” as well as interest confined to “classical Indian aesthetics and the perfection of bodily movement and gesture in traditional forms” (Bhatia 158). This obsession with the differences between those in other cultures is reflected in his production, which devotes a disproportionate amount of time—a full third of the play—to the final battle scene, and by doing so, loses the subplots that have significant repercussions in the Indian political, social, and theological worldview. Gone are the legends of “Rama and Sita, Savitri, Manu, Bhagiratha, Nala and Damayanti, Garuda, Some, and others” (Dasgupta 14).

Surely, it is absurd to expect any adaptation of the Mahabharata to ignore traditional classical Indian aesthetics or to include the multitude of details that compromise the epic, but it would be entirely possible to shift the emphasis away from displays of classical bodily movement and the final battle scene, to focus instead on the stories that have deep significance in understanding Indian reality and attitudes—the India beyond the exotic, Orientalized India of Western popular culture. By encompassing these perhaps less visually striking or dramatically engaging characteristics, his production may have
delved into themes more important to understanding modern Indian philosophy and the cross-cultural ties that unite India and the West, concepts such as *dharama*, or duty, karma, loyalty, and love which are central to understanding the *Mahabharata*. Indeed, rather than reinforcing the “otherness” of Indians, he may have underscored the universality of the human experience. He unnecessarily accentuates differences by focusing on exotic and visually stunning scenes, and he allows cultural exchange to “descend to banal generalities about the foreign culture,” failing to “uncover its specificities, in actual, and not merely perceived, links with its own society” (Dasgupta 11). Cultural exchange in theater should be a reciprocal process, not a medium with which one culture reinforces its stereotypes of another. Further, Brook’s emphasis of the past and otherness in India is responsible for his ignoring that “the poem [*the Mahabharata*] is very much a text in and for the present because it is constantly being rewritten” (Bhatia 160). He misses an opportunity for contemporary dialogue with India, a chance to connect cultures and ideas. Even if he did not incorporate elements of modern *Mahabharata* readings in his production, it would have been very possible and beneficial to include some culturally significant scenes and describe the imprint of the *Mahabharata* on modern Indian life. Instead, he focuses on a limited number of scenes and the classical background of the work in a way that only contributes to the West.

Thus, Brook’s production exemplifies the phenomenon of taxonomic theater, a type of intercultural theater that classifies other cultures in relation to a dominant culture, primarily Western traditional theater culture. Though advocates of taxonomic theater, also sometimes called theater anthropologists, assert that their work strives to uncover the universality in humanity, in practice, taxonomic theater is essentially “dedicated to clearly and simplistically demarcating the boundaries between cultures” (Chaudri 34). It is perhaps because of his tendency to underscore “alien” practices and ideas in other cultures that Brook’s handling of the *Mahabharata* drew the ire of so many Indians, who saw his production as a trivialization of a sacred book and an affront to their philosophy. Some have criticized the production’s shallow characters, including its “two-dimensional portraiture of Krishna,” a critical figure in Hindu theology (Bharucha, View 1644). The shallowness of characters is a byproduct of Orientalism—it is impossible to portray characters meaningfully when they are reduced to broad generalizations. Brook has been accused of “emphasizing, even fetishizing, cultural difference,” an unfortunate outcome, considering intercultural theater holds so much positive potential (Chaudri 34).

Orientalism is a remnant of colonial exploitation in that it is a form of cultural condescension and ensures that only one culture benefits from intercultural exchange. It is crucial that those crafting theater that merges various cultures avoid the temptation to generalize and solely focus on benefitting one culture: ideal intercultural theater borrows and contributes equally to all involved cultures. Only with meaningful interaction is it possible to transcend the generalizations and misunderstandings of the past.

**Evolution of and Vision for Intercultural Theater**

Twenty-five years have elapsed since Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata*, and a variety of performances have explored the potentialities of intercultural theater. As the genre has matured, its methods have become more refined, its goals more sophisticated. There are still many opportunities for experimentation, and a set of principles for the production of positive intercultural theater has begun to emerge to guide future theater creators and
performers. It will be useful to survey some of these core principles by examining the production and performances of Kathakali King Lear, which, though it was still criticized by some traditionalists, offers a model for theater that employs techniques from and enriches both Western and Indian traditions. The performance is striking, the visuals vivid, and the narrative compelling. For those in the West, the new medium invigorates an often-performed narrative, and for audiences in India, the Shakespearean narrative is a refreshing addition to the canon of a traditional genre. Though the costumes and techniques may seem exotic superficially, the foundational ideology and actual execution of the performances serve to highlight universal themes while celebrating specific traditions.

Kathakali is a dance and dramatic genre hailing from the southwestern state of Kerala in India. The tradition employs no spoken word—narratives are communicated through precise and evocative gestures and expressions. Performers dress in elaborate costumes and wear colorful makeup that indicates their placement into established character archetypes—for example, green symbolizes nobility while black represents villainy. Thus, it is clear that the tradition has many established patterns that would confront the intercultural theater creator with many challenges—what changes would enhance the performance’s impact, what changes would devalue it? There is no obvious answer, but particular decisions made by the Keli Dance Company, the producers of Kathakali King Lear, may provide some insight into this question as well as other principles of positive intercultural theater.

Kathakali King Lear represents a shift away from the notion that intercultural theater serves to transport the ideas of a “source” culture into a “target” culture, a framework first established by intercultural theorist Patrice Pavis in his work on cross-cultural theater. Indeed, unlike Brook’s Mahabharata, which was only staged in Paris and New York, Kathakali King Lear toured both India and England, gaining attention with performances at both Shakespeare’s Globe in London and at Kathakali’s cultural center, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Further, it is impossible to classify the drama as either predominantly Indian or English, and this fusion of disjoint traditions marks the production as an exemplar for future intercultural performance. It employs a traditional Indian dramatic medium to present a classic English play, but aspects of both Kathakali and King Lear are modified in order to accommodate the needs of a performance intended for both Western and Indian audiences. Unlike Brook’s production, which is a Western appropriation—and many would argue, a misappropriation—of an Indian text into

Fig. 3. Kathakali character. Here the actor wears standard performance attire.
the Western theater form without adopting any specifically Indian traditional idioms, *Kathakali King Lear* exhibits various modifications to both Kathakali and *King Lear* in order to enhance the performance's value among and bridge the differences between those in a variety of contexts.

For example, aspects of Shakespeare’s drama were altered when the performance’s creators deemed such action necessary. For example, there was some controversy surrounding the drama’s choices for Kathakali analogues to Goneril, Regan, and King Lear. Goneril and Regan were presented as demonic teppu, a form that, though able to symbolize the characters’ capacity for monstrous actions, is less able to capture the sinister, conspiring nature of the characters (Daugherty 61). Indeed, the barbarity of the types is sometimes reserved for farcically cruel characters; even if attempts were made to downplay this aspect, some nuances of Shakespeare’s drama were sacrificed. The archetype katti was chosen for King Lear; katti translates literally into knife. Though the form reflects the darker, self-destructive tendencies of King Lear, it is typically not associated with nobility. The form is only an approximation of the Shakespearean tragic hero. *Kathakali King Lear* treated both Kathakali and Shakespeare with less rigor and authenticity than more traditional, intracultural performances.

Conversely, while most of the play’s characters can be classified into Kathakali typology—the King of France as a paccha, or nobleman, Cordelia as a minnuku, a pure woman, Goneril and Regan as teppu, or demons, etc.—the creators departed from Kathakali conventions with the character of the Fool (Daugherty 60). The Fool, who has no obvious analogue in Kathakali, was depicted as a vidushaka, a jester character form typically reserved to genres only remotely connected to Kathakali. Nonetheless, the decision was seen as necessary in order to stay faithful to Shakespeare’s directions. Further, the casting of a European woman, Annette Leday, in the role of Cordelia marked a dramatic departure from Kathakali’s all-male, all-Indian convention. Lascivious rumors circulated in the Indian Kathakali circuit; the break from convention was greeted with gossip and resistance by traditionalists. However, in the eyes of the progressive producers of *Kathakali King Lear*, artistic license was necessary to advance their intercultural vision.

Indeed, it is arguable that, by including a woman in the performance, the production expanded Kathakali’s horizons, enriching the tradition rather than undermining it. The potential benefits of this perspective are wide-ranging—in the process of adapting certain traditions, it becomes possible to enhance them, to provide unexpected power and insight. It is challenging, perhaps impossible, to judge objectively that which is appropriate artistic liberty and that which is disrespecting tradition, but every sensitive maker of intercultural theater must daily confront such decisions. In the eyes of the creators of *Kathakali King Lear*, loss to the Indian tradition was seen as minimal, and more than enough compensated by the benefits of portraying the character in the way Shakespeare envisioned.

Balancing the influences of traditions in intercultural theater is ideal, but in any intercultural theater performance, there are bound to be some difficult, seemingly arbitrary decisions to make, choices that often draw criticism from traditionalists. Nevertheless, these accommodations, if prudently implemented, may allow audiences to gain further, refreshing insight. Some criticisms are the result of cultural misunderstanding and close-mindedness—a London critic mocked the peacock feathers that Goneril and Regan wore as “big toilet brushes” (Gardner 18). However, some criticism is
substantive and sophisticated, pointing to the very real revisionism in intercultural performance. For example, one Shakespeare scholar asserted that “outrageous clowning and mock ferocity undermine any sinister impact [Goneril] might otherwise have” (Pitkow 224). This is a very valid criticism directed towards the portrayal of Goneril as a teppu, and it speaks to the core problems of merging cultures through theater. It is difficult to sensitively reconcile traditions that have deep histories predating any prolonged contact between cultures, let alone between art forms. Beyond technical matters of performance, it is difficult to resolve the differences in worldviews of cultures that matured in isolation from each other. For example, distinguished Kathakali critic Appukuttan Nair took issue with a performance, not focusing on the “female Cordelia, the heroic King of France, missing headgear, or blips in character type choice, but on the non-epic nature of the characters” (Daugherty 64). Nair presented his philosophical disagreement with the creators of Kathakali King Lear as follows:

Only epic, non-human beings are chosen for the re-creation of a story for presentation on the stage. And that presentation, whether in form, colour, behaviour, or sound, is deliberately made contra-human, to exist in another world: that of the imagination of the connoisseur. (D. A. Nair and Paniker 10)

It may be easy to point out the problems with past intercultural theater performances, as was demonstrated by critics’ deconstruction of Peter Brook’s Mahabharata, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, of Kathakali King Lear, but it remains an overwhelming task, and will probably stay so for the foreseeable future, to successfully incorporate, respect, and expand the traditions of multiple cultures in a single performance. This is the vision that underlies the most successful intercultural productions, and it is one that, though a daunting task, holds potential to positively redefine cultural interconnections.

Though the intercultural theater is a relatively recent development in the theater world, analyzing a few past performances can inform how to better craft future performances. As the genre develops and as new productions explore the potentialities of intercultural theater, there is hope that performances leave taxonomic theater in the past and seek to generally engage the cultures in which performances become immersed, that, as so many have hoped for before, “home countries and communities, from where these resources emanated, receive for their contribution to the creative process” (Chaudri 39). Though history is replete with examples of intercultural strife, colonialism, nationalism, and misunderstanding, the new millennium promises an unprecedented level of cross-cultural communication and contact resulting from globalization, and, perhaps, in the domain of intercultural theater, this dialogue can foster mutual respect, understanding, and growth. Cross-cultural exchanges are complex and fraught with tensions and ambiguities, but only by confronting these challenges is there hope to overcome them. Historically, intercultural theater has both reflected the nature of intercultural relationships as well as influenced their development. From Durlabh Bandhu to Shakespeare Wallah, from the Mahabharata to Kathakali King Lear, intercultural theater has not simply been a byproduct of cultural interaction—it has been an active agent in shaping cultural vision and philosophies. Intercultural theater has the potential to shape worldviews—to either reinforce colonialism or promote dialogue, to incite antagonism or advocate harmony. In this way, intercultural theater can serve as a guide for how to model international contact: its relevance is not confined to performing arts or the
artifice of the stage, it is crucial for our navigation through the complex reality of an interconnected globe.

Works Cited
Perhaps the most acute rhetorical challenge Alex faced in writing this superb essay was how to make the complexity of contemporary video games intelligible to an audience who understood very little about them. Having grown up playing a paper version of Dungeons and Dragons, at a time when the numbing simplicity of video games such as *Pong* or *Hunt the Wumpus* prevented rather than facilitated immersion, I was an unlikely though ultimately useful foil for Alex’s investigation into MMORPGs. For Alex’s own familiarity with these games, in his early drafts, prevented him from writing about them in a way that would be understood by anybody but the initiated. After one awkward conference, in which Alex spent the majority of our time together trying to explain to me how an avatar could gather and sell acorns, thereby generating a synthetic economy, Alex embarked on the difficult task of recasting his material in language that could be understood by generations that did not grow up with laptops on their laps. Anybody unfamiliar with MMORPGs should be grateful to Alex for the concessions he makes to our ignorance. Without those two explanatory sections, “What is a MMORPG?” and “Life in a Synthetic World”, both of which are expertly rendered by Alex, I for one would have been quite unprepared to understand the exhilarating connections that Alex draws later in the essay between the contemporary construction of synthetic worlds and the world-building from an imagined state-of-nature that characterized so much eighteenth-century political thought. Other historical analogies—to Locke and Descartes on personal identity, to Plato and Cervantes on the dangers of the fictive—generously permit the non-gamers among Alex’s readers to understand the conceptual issues that MMORPEGs raise. I thank Alex for the instruction I received.

—Michael Reid
MMORPGs: A Medium for Utopian and Experimental Genesis

Alexander Ryan

“The history of any one part of the earth, like the life of a soldier, consists of long periods of boredom and short periods of terror.”
—Derek Victor Ager

The popular movie *The Matrix*, released in 1999 and familiar to many, introduced an alternate reality where participants could physically plug themselves into a machine to experience what was advertised to be a perfect world, all mediated by a central computer that offered sustainability to all of its inhabitants. The development of such a supercomputer (Matrix) was given in the movie as well, as Agent Smith explains:

Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world? Where none suffered, where everyone would be happy. It was a disaster. [...] Some believed we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world. [...] The perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from. Which is why the Matrix was redesigned to this: the peak of your civilization.

The concept of alternative realities such as this one has been manifested in many other cultural icons, most recently in the movie *Avatar*. Whether real-world technology is hindering the realization of such a fascinating opportunity, or agitation is hindering the creation of such a frightening system from existing resources, there are no science-fiction-motivated alternative realities existing today which allow for an immersive experience like that in *The Matrix*. Or are they hiding from our recognition? Consider the following advertisement for a hypothetical world which we shall call “Irth” for now:

Irth is an online 3D virtual world imagined and designed by you. From the moment you enter Irth, you’ll discover a universe brimming with people and possibilities. Create and customize your own digital 3D persona. Do what you love, with the people you love, from anywhere in the world. Irth is a world imagined, built and created by its Residents – people like you. Every minute, Residents assemble buildings, design new fashion lines and launch clubs and businesses. There’s always more to see and do. [...] Keep in touch with friends in real time [...] through voice chat. Millions of Residents from around the world have made Irth their online home, so there is no lack of people to meet or old friends to reconnect with. Irth has its own economy, with its very own virtual currency. Virtual job opportunities in Irth abound. There are full-time dancers, models, bouncers, architects, fashion designers, psychologists, even planners and DJs, to name a few. [...] In Irth you can buy virtual
land and build your dream house, open your own business, create an amusement park or assemble a space station.

Does Irth not sound like precisely the kind of alternative reality that both fascinates and frightens us? The shocking significance of this advertisement is that Irth actually exists, under a different name; the advertisement above was quoted from the official website for the video game Second Life (“What is Second Life?”). And according to research reports done by Linden Labs, the hosting company of the game, there have been more than 88,000 concurrent users within Second Life (“How Many Users?”). We will focus more on the significant (and eerie) specifics and statistics of Second Life later.

Second Life is a member of the video game genre dubbed with the acronym MMORPG (often pronounced “mor-peg”, plural “mor-pens”), and this paper will focus on the progression of the MMORPG genre and its influence on the tangible world. Before engaging the relevant intricacies of the genre to develop its significance, it may be more enlightening to the reader to understand a little of the history of the genre and what the mouthful of an acronym stands for.

**What is an MMORPG?**

An MMORPG is a Massive(ly) Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. Its origins date back to tabletop role playing games (RPGs) such as Dungeons and Dragons (DnD), where (according to the DnD handbook) players select specific characters to play as, and thus pretend to be an allied group (“party”) of “adventurers,” and direct their individual characters’ interactions. The role-playing is directed by a Dungeon Master (DM) who describes both the settings that the party will face and the non-player characters (NPCs) that the players will encounter, where the outcomes of such encounters are also decided by the DM based on the players’ decisions (including use of magic, combat, environmental advantages). The history of the development of RPGs itself is rich, although perhaps too involved to address in the development of MMORPGs.

The move from tabletop settings to digital environments first appeared in a computer game named *Adventure* developed by Will Crowther and Don Woods in 1976 (Adams). *Adventure* was simply a DnD game with an “interesting twist—the Dungeon Master...was played by the *Adventure* computer program itself” (Bartle 5); however, *Adventure* was limited to one participating player. A decent success, *Adventure* inspired a similar game named *Zork*, originally coded in 1977 by a group of students from MIT (and later refined in 1980 by professionals from Infocom), which added several features to *Adventure’s* groundwork, but was still unfortunately single-player (Bartle 7).

The first actual computerized multiplayer form of an RPG materialized in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeon/Dimension/Domain based on different interpretations), which were computerized non-graphical interfaces where players relived similar playstyles and settings as in DnD through text-based communication (Bartle 9). The forerunner of MUDs was developed by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle himself in 1978, spawning similar projects such as *Amp, Gods*, and *Shades*.

Technological advancements of the late 1980s and 1990s allowed for the development of actual 3D environments for such rich stories to take place, and the games could be played through the internet (Online) with a massive number of players simultaneously, as the modern MMORPG comes into play. Thus MMORPGs, in their most basic form, represent three-dimensional virtual (computer-generated) environments where...
multitudes of players simultaneously participate in some form of role-playing together, which depends highly on the specific game, by controlling a three-dimensional character that can interact with and move within the world of the MMORPG (an overview of how the actual gameplay works will be given later). The program accredited with the popularization of the genre was *Ultima Online*, released in 1997 (Lequerica-calvo), and the popular MMORPGs thus far include (in their order of release) *EVE Online*, *Star Wars: Galaxies*, *Everquest*, *Second Life*, and *World of Warcraft* (Morris).

Before we move on, succinct terminology is more than crucial for the proper discussion and perception of such an abstract (and largely undeveloped) system. A “world” will specifically refer to an environment within which large numbers of intelligent beings (such as humans) can interact. The “tangible” world will refer to the natural world around us, outside of any video game, and the “synthetic” world will refer to any environment, atmosphere, or functional society that exists within an MMORPG. The terms “out-of-game” and “in-game” will likewise refer to objects or concepts that specifically refer to existence in the tangible or synthetic world, respectively. A “gamer” or “participant” will refer to the human in the tangible world who actively controls an in-game “avatar” (referred to previously as a character) through which he or she participates in the institutions of a synthetic world. The term “to engage,” when used in the context of gaming or where not otherwise obvious, will be used with the applied meaning of to participate in a synthetic world.

With the conceptual language needed to communicate effectively, the advancing state of MMORPGs will be explored in depth under both an analytical delineation of modern synthetic worlds and a classical interpretation of the significance of such an advanced framework, with the intent to show that a synthetic world can indeed serve as a customizable hosting environment for prominent intelligent interaction, and that with precise design and application, can represent an invaluable simulative model for experimental research of the tangible world or an independent environment that can foster a unique developing civilization. However, as the discussion concerning MMORPGs in particular is unfolded, I urge the reader to remember that this argument pertains not to the gamers who engage, but to the actual synthetic worlds; given that gamers themselves engage in video games for a variety of motives which could lend their own individual treatments of video games (some just for entertainment, some to share social connections, and some to “get away” from real-life), it is a property of the synthetic world itself, and not of the gamers who participate within it, to serve as a model of the tangible world or foster a parallel development of civilization. Likewise, the reasons for the current widespread popularity of the MMORPG genre are thus of little concern here.

**Video Games: A Medium of Expression**

Video games as a medium of entertainment have existed since the days of *Pong* almost forty years ago; Steven Malliet, a historian who specializes in video games as a mode of entertainment, argues that by the early 1980s, games such as *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* that were available in arcades made video gaming a widespread success, eventually reaching their way into households by 1982 through game consoles, developed by companies such as Atari and Apple. As a result of this acceptability of video games as entertainment, parents became increasingly worried about lengthy gaming sessions by their children, and were equally concerned with any
potential negative effects that gaming could cause, according to Edward Castronova, an economist who specializes in video game research (Virtual Worlds).

Consistent with Castronova’s claim, a wealth of studies were performed in the early 1990s and 2000s that attempted to chronicle the effects between video games, as a mode of entertainment, and gamers. A psychologist specializing in cognitive development, John Gee, in his book Good Video Games and Good Learning, collected information from many other psychologists and analyzed them to understand both the positive and negative consequences of engaging in this medium. Focusing first on gaming as a process, and then on specific gaming genres and examples, Gee highlights the strong correlative relationship between video games and cognitive ability, as “good video games are thinking tools” (17), but also posits that negative social repercussions may equally exist, specifically that a “danger exists if games show...only one world, one world view” (16).

These proposed negative repercussions were studied by psychologists such as Barrie Gunter in the late 1990s, who performed surveys and analyzed existing literature to ultimately conclude that consequences including video game addiction and increased aggressive behavior could be linked directly to gaming. However, Mark Griffiths, a developmental psychologist, looked upon the human psychological connection to video games in 1999 under a different lamp, noticing that gaming appears to lead to cognitive rehabilitation or increased pain management (as opposed to increased aggressive behavior) (168). In 2000, Robyn Holmes and Anthony Pellegrini studied psychosocial effects of video games, and in their paper Children’s Social Behavior during Video Game Play even cited that many related studies are ambiguous, and posited that “more research in this area is sorely needed... [to understand] this play medium” (142). Despite the outcomes of these studies, in the period from 1990 to the early 2000s, academics were treating video games as a play medium, purely engaged for its entertainment value with possible cognitive, psychological, or psychosocial harms or benefits.

The belief that a developing entertainment medium can leave undesired, or even dangerous, residues upon the participating members of society is in no way recent or unforeseen, and was manifested in the Western world at least as early as the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. In his Republic, Plato discusses that in an ideal society, all forms of poetry should be forbidden, under the rationale that poems are themselves nothing but idealized fabrications from a poet’s perception of reality and are not only void in meaningful substance, but are in essence destructively misleading because of the poet’s lack of complete proficiency concerning the phenomena or entities about which he writes. If a reader were to become too entranced by the deceiving poetry, particularly if he were young or possessed a malleable interpretation of his surroundings, the poems would control his experience of life, or would cause him to experience his life in the context of the fantasies within the poems.

The exact fears of revolutionized entertainment media were revived again when the novel was popularized as a literary mode, manifested in such forms as the famous story of Don Quixote by Cervantes or Miguel de Unamuno’s novel Niebla as explored by Cesáreo Bandera in his Reflections on the Birth of the Modern Novel, positing that novels could challenge “the space where the difference between reality and fiction” is (299). Furthermore, where the poem as a literary form focused on beautiful, idealized phenomena or epic journeys, with the novel came more practical, understandable characters with whom audiences could often seamlessly relate; thus it is not surprising that even though
society may have either grown accustomed to or had to an extent written off the implied dangers of poetry, the novel introduced an even more apparent connection between the readers and its stories. The same fearful response appeared again with television when audiences could actually see and hear the stories unfolding.

Given this historical development of entertainment media in Western civilization, it would perhaps be apocalyptic if video games as a medium were installed in society without their own analogous cautions and apprehensions. Like their predecessors, video games provide their participants with an experience of an alternate or idealized reality; however, at the utmost dismay to those who have historically feared such modes of mimicry, video games take the level of immersion one step further, where the gamers can actually manipulate and control the reality they are experiencing, and can thus generate results based on their decisions and desires.

Furthermore, as video games, MMORPGs inherited the same associated fears as proposed; however, parents became even more concerned as their children became more involved with a MMORPG, spending hours in-game and limiting their out-of-game socialization. In fact, Kimberly Young mentions in her article “Addiction to MMORPGs: Symptoms and Treatment” a mother who “talked to her son's guidance counselors, the school psychologist, and two local addiction rehabilitation centers,” crying about the degree that her son's MMORPG immersion had altered his experience of reality:

They all told me it was a phase and that I should try to limit my son's game playing. They didn't understand that I couldn't. He had lost touch with reality. My son lost interest in everything else. He didn't want to eat, sleep, or go to school, the game was the only thing that mattered to him. When I told him to get offline, he yelled, screamed, and once, he pushed me. This isn’t my son. He's a quiet and loving boy. Now, I don’t know who he is.

As mentioned, the reasons for such a crazed engagement in MMORPGs are not of importance to the analysis in this paper; however, reports like this one, although largely anecdotal, are by no means infrequent. The seemingly significant experience of MMORPG immersion has captured the fearful attention of many parents and counselors like the one above; given that these borderline horrified reactions have already surfaced in the context of MMORPGs, it may seem at first heretical to claim there is constructive utility present inherently in the same system. Furthermore, their fear is entirely rational and justified, and can be easily understood under the discussed historical trend of response intensity to media by degree of participant involvement, as there is another added level of captivation present in MMORPGs—that the gamer, in a way, can become his avatar. While this claim is currently entirely unjustified, perhaps we can begin our understanding of the intricacies of these engrossing games with a brief narrative; it is of course impossible to classify the activities and environments of every MMORPG, so this narrative is based around World of Warcraft, which enjoys over 11.5 million subscribers (Blizzard Entertainment Press), and should supply a primitive overview of what playing an MMORPG is like.

Life in a Synthetic World

Having recently returned from a trip to Best Buy, Adam opens up his new copy of World of Warcraft. After waiting three hours for the program to install on his computer.
and apply recent patches, Adam is finally able to create an account (with a name and password, to protect his online identity) and log into the game. Before he is able to play, he must consent to pay a monthly subscription fee, and agree to a Terms of Service, stating that he will not share his account with anybody else, sell his account on eBay, write computer programs to control his character for him, and other forbidden activities.

Now a long list of various shards (also often called servers or worlds, terms that are discarded here because of ambiguity) appears on Adam’s screen; shards represent different instances of the exact same game, but run through different hosting servers (possibly originally for technological limitations of a single hosting server connecting to millions of clients) which are organized by geographical region; that is, within the long list of shards there is a sublist of Pacific-time-zone shards with a middle-to-low population of regular players (compared to other shards) which are identified as “Recommended,” followed by all other servers of different time zones, or different population densities which are marked accordingly. Adam must decide a shard to play on, and he cannot transfer his avatars between shards (so if he wants to play with friends, he has to devote himself to the same shard as they did). Adam agrees to the first shard on the Recommended list—Korgath.

He is finally faced with an avatar creation process. Adam views a screen full of character options (see fig. 1). He can select from different races for his avatar, such as Trolls, Orcs, Humans, or Dwarves, each with individual attributes, benefits, and disadvantages. Fascinated with magic and their tall, muscular structure, Adam chooses to make his avatar a Night Elf, as members of that race can “fade into the shadows,” are “more difficult to hit,” and are “resistant to Nature damage,” whatever that means; a brief description is given that “ten thousand years ago, the Night Elves founded a vast empire, but their reckless use of primal magic brought them to ruin. In grief, they withdrew to the forests and remained isolated there...”

Adam can also pick between a plethora of character “classes” which vary in their experience style; he can make his Night Elf a Warrior (heavy-built combat fighter that wears plate armor), a Hunter (with a bow-and-arrow, as well as the ability to control
animals), a Rogue (an assassin or scout that can sneak around in stealth, wielding two daggers), a Priest! This is something that Adam has fantasized, as “Priests are well-rounded healers with a variety of tools. However, they can also sacrifice their healing to deal damage with Shadow magic. Within society, priests act as the spiritual leaders...” Satisfying.

After deciding on a Night Elf Priest, Adam is faced with a plethora of customization options for his appearance—he can choose his avatar’s gender, skin color, facial features, hair style, hair color. He now must also give this priest a name. How about calling it Adam? He types it in; “That name is unavailable.” Of course. Gandalf? Taken. In fact, none of his favorite Lord of the Rings characters’ names are available, nor Merlin characters. That is unfortunate, but Adam becomes more creative: Adamagic. Perfect. Having successfully completed his avatar creation, he clicks the “Enter World” button and watches the loading screen finish.

Upon entering the world, the game recounts some of the lore associated with his Night Elf character, and gives Adamagic an understanding of what is happening in society around him. The camera flies around the Shadowglen forest, and a deep voice tells Adam about the history of the “immortal Night Elves,” secluded in the forest, now rising to combat some invading Burning Legion; to combat the invasion, the Night Elves have allied themselves with the Dwarves, Humans, and Gnomes. The camera finally settles on the avatar Adam created, and a few tutorials teach Adam how to control Adamagic. He can turn left and right, walk forward or backward with the appropriate arrow keys (or likewise use similar mouse controls for movement); with a little practice, this system becomes second-nature. As he moves, the camera either closely follows Adamagic, or optionally can be placed to emulate his “vision,” so Adam can see just as Adamagic would see.

![Fig. 2. Upon entering the world, Adamagic sees a guardian of his clan ahead in the forest. Source: World of Warcraft. 19 Mar 2010.](image)

A higher member of the Night Elf clan (not controlled by a human, but rather, programmed) is standing a couple paces in front of Adamagic (see fig. 2). Adamagic walks forward, and is told to right-click to speak with the elf. He tells Adamagic of a disturbance in the nearby woods—Adamagic’s first quest. As Adamagic fights the panthers that
are attacking the settlement, he learns how to use his magic abilities and other attacks. After practicing for awhile, Adamagic's combat skills improve as well, and Adamagic can gain *levels*, increasing his health pool and magic power, and granting him new abilities. Also during his first quest, Adamagic meets another avatar, a warrior named Dejay, who is also slaying panthers for the quest. They team up in a *party* to tackle the task together.

Social interaction is straightforward; Adamagic can "speak" text (that Adam types) that only nearby avatars can hear (that is, see in chat bubbles above Adamagic’s head), “yell” phrases so more distant avatars can hear, or have private conversations in the *parties* and other groups that avatars form that can be heard by all involved regardless of distance. Many players also invest in headsets with microphones so they may directly speak with the other avatars they encounter.

After gaining sufficient knowledge of the immediate forest around him (and befriending a sufficient number of fellow avatars), Adamagic is informed by his elders of possible paths to continue his adventure, including the locations of other nearby settlements, of the bustling city of Darnassus near the coast, and of faraway continents. Traveling the world, whenever he completes quests, Adamagic is rewarded with weapons and precious armor that he can equip, assorted items he can use, and *gold*. He can find similar (or even better) rewards from the corpses of various monsters he slays as well as powerful enemies lurking in fortresses or hostile cave settlements. An efficient interface is available for Adamagic to decide on which armor pieces he wants to wear on each section of his body; extra armor pieces, as well as items which cannot be equipped such as potions, food (to restore health), water (to restore magic power), and cloth scraps he collects, are stored in a backpack that can be easily accessed anywhere.

Of course, Adamagic can “die” if he is defeated by strong enemies. However, this is more of a nuisance than a definite termination of gameplay; Adamagic can be “revived” by a (programmed) spirit healer, at the cost of a small amount of gold or items, or by other avatars with the appropriate ability.
join his guild, which Vongimi claims is dedicated to helping its members explore the world and create parties to easily complete quests. Guilds will be explored in more depth later.

Upon eventually reaching Darnassus, Adamagic sees hundreds of avatars at a bank to store items, at profession trainers, at an auction house, and lazily standing around in the streets, talking to others about guild-related business, activities of the most superior guilds of powerful avatars, or simply how long it’s been since they last ran into each other (see fig. 3). The gold that Adamagic has collected can be used to buy armor that other professional avatars crafted or rare items that avatars are selling. An in-depth discussion of economic activity will be supplied later.

When Adam’s gaming session is finished, he logs out and Adamagic, along with the contents of his backpack, his bank account, and gold pieces he has collected, is saved and will be recovered in an identical state on the next occasion Adam decides to play.

The Philosophy of Gamer-Avatar Duality

"Although perhaps I have a body, which is very closely conjoined to me, [...] it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.” — René Descartes (Philosophical Writings 55)

It is easy to see that the distinction between Adam and Adamagic becomes blurred to at least a recognizable extent; does the Night Elf elder instruct Adamagic how to reach Darnassus, or Adam? Consistent with the views of John Gee that role-playing games cause the gamers to engage in a virtual avatar development, Castronova claims that it is easy for a “user to become immersed in the virtual space” (Synthetic Worlds 51), explaining that these users sometimes feel that “I am there” as opposed to ‘my character is in the game.” MMORPG gamers thus seem to experience some sort of apparent confusion between the tangible reality and the synthetic reality. Before attempting to even rationalize this profound mistake, we turn to some more concrete data from specialists in the field.

Under a conservatively detached perspective (that is, treating the avatar not as an actual representation of the gamer, but rather as more of a toy), this problem can be elementarily understood through the manifestation of the personality of the gamer within the appearance of his associated avatar. A study concerning avatar choices titled “Our Virtual Bodies, Ourselves?” by Nick Yee, a research specialist in MMORPG gaming and immersive reality, found an incredible correlation between avatar appearances, synthetic-world immersion scores, and motivations for gamer participation, which concluded with two immensely interesting facts: that gamers statistically prefer close mirrors of themselves for avatars, as “taller people prefer taller avatars, older people prefer older avatars, male players prefer more masculine characters, and female players prefer more feminine characters,” and also that “different personalities and motivations are drawn to different character types” (or character classes, like Priests); thus gamers often craft in-game characters which noticeably resemble an extension of themselves in synthetic space. Likewise, Nicolas Ducheneaut and others studied specifically the different options available to users creating avatars in different synthetic worlds, eventually concluding that “a user’s personality remains fairly congruent across online and offline environments,” as expressed in their paper “Body and Mind.”

However, even though this attempt to generate a resemblance between the gamer
and his avatar could have been initially contingent on a comprehensible imagination of the gamer in a fantastical setting, after immersion within synthetic worlds, gamers develop more profound views of their relationship with their avatar. Another study of over two thousand gamers by Nick Yee on avatar philosophy demographics (“Identity Projection”) found that around 38% of respondents agreed that their in-game avatars are simply “pawns in a game;” that is, there is not much actual psychological connection between the gamer and his avatar, and the gamers thus participate solely for entertainment. Interestingly, 27% of the respondents agreed that their avatars are “idealized versions of themselves,” thus looking to their synthetic equals as possible replacements for their tangible self, exhibiting “personal and emotional investment in their characters.” Furthermore, at least 44% of the participants responded consistently with the belief that their tangible self is in part defined by their synthetic counterparts—that to the individual gamer, his avatar is “a part of an extension of me.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENT</th>
<th>RESPONDER AGREEMENT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I live outside Norrath but I travel there regularly.</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live in Norrath but I travel outside of it regularly.</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I could spent more time in Norrath than I currently do now.</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I could, I would spend all of my time in Norrath.</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. The Norrath Economic Survey 2001. Percent of perceived immersion level of Everquest participants. (Synthetic Worlds 59)

Along similar lines, but to a more drastic intensity of gamer-avatar involvement, in a shocking study titled The Norrath Economic Survey 2001 (see table 1) in the early years of MMORPG introduction, Castronova found that up to 20% of participants in the MMORPG Everquest whom he interviewed (in a pool of 3,300 individuals) agreed to the statement “I live in Norrath [the synthetic world within Everquest], but travel outside of it regularly” and 22% agreed that they would prefer to “spend all of [their] time in Norrath;” furthermore, 58% agreed to the statement “I wish could spend more time in Norrath than I currently do now” (Synthetic Worlds 59). Of course, there was still a large proportion (84%) of gamers who still agreed that “I live outside Norrath...,” and although the wording of the relevant answer choices to an extent does beg the extrapolation, it is quite clear from this study that a respectable proportion of the respondents are challenging the distinction between their avatars and themselves.

Before attempting to explain this blurring distinction, it is important to note that as mentioned previously, the analysis of the varied motivations of the gamers to engage, which occasion the diverse intensities of the experience of individual gamers, is beyond the scope of this paper, as they are largely independent of the synthetic worlds themselves; nevertheless, the mere frequency of gamers who feel that synthetic worlds serve as at least an acceptable replacement to the tangible world suggests that some specific activities within the synthetic world adequately mirror those of the tangible. At the most basic level, this replacement theory suggests that the avatar itself adequately replaces some previous conception that the gamer had of his self, since this online persona is the gamer’s only representation within the synthetic world.

It is both fascinating and relevant to realize that this idea of accepting the
gamer’s synthetic-world counterpart in substitution for the gamer’s tangible body is consistent with the widely-debated philosophical theory of dualism, which has its roots in Neoplatonism and was advanced thoroughly by René Descartes; it posits (in some general interpretations) that the mind, the basis of a human’s consciousness and regarded as the union of intelllection and imagination, is separate and distinct from the body, a physical extension in space through which a person interacts with the world in which he exists. Furthermore, even though the mind and the body are distinct, they are closely connected and in a sense influence each other, in that the body is under the explicit manipulative control of the mind, while the mind enjoys its perception, representation, and communication as a result of its associated body. Of particular relevance in the context of my argument here is that many interpretations of the theory, including the one by Descartes himself, mention that the specific tangible body that a person’s mind seemingly controls (or inhabits) does not fulfill an exclusive preconceived responsibility; that is, our tangible bodies are simply an instance of the more general concept of an embodiment, any concrete manifestation that allows for a mind to effectively operate within a hosting world.

A (possibly more widely accepted) modern philosophical theory, which is also relevant to our purpose, emerged in the Enlightenment largely by way of John Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Locke claims that personal identity “depends on consciousness, not on substance”; that is, a person remains the same person regardless of his extension in space, defined only by his continuous acts of consciousness. In fact, it is not surprising that Locke’s theories have already been revived in the Age of Technology; one notable neo-Lockean view is expressed by Derek Parfit, a contemporary British philosopher, who ventures so far as to claim that a person is “‘software’ or ‘information’ rather than ‘hardware’: not a material object, but something realized in a material object, and capable of being transmitted from one material object to another” (Ayers 271). That is, the avatar within a synthetic world could serve as a hosting medium for a gamer’s consciousness, and the avatar can become the gamer.

Of course, these general theories of personal identity do have unavoidable criticism even by many modern philosophers and neurologists (most commonly that brain damage causes predictable, irreversible harm on a person’s intelllection), although Ayers in his study of Locke claims that “the debate on personal identity has hardly moved on since the innovations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (281). Despite such criticism of general theories of personal identity, the avatar, through the channels of the technological capabilities of our society, the body’s basic senses, and the established connection between the mind (or consciousness) and the body, can replace many (almost all) of the tangible body’s supposed duties: a gamer’s perception of the synthetic world is formed through his avatar’s own perspective, with the help of his tangible body’s eyes (and computer monitor) and ears (and speakers); a gamer’s communication with the synthetic world is mediated by his consciousness feeding text through his nerves, fingers, keyboard connections, and internet connection, finally being manifested as words from his avatar; and a gamer’s representation within the synthetic world is defined by the avatar itself, in conjunction with a respected realization that avatars, in essence, are gamers. Thus, as conservatively as possible, I urge the reader to regard a gamer’s avatar, at the current technological sophistication of MMORPG development, as at least a quasi-embodiment of the gamer within a synthetic world.
If we so treat a gamer’s avatar as his synthetic quasi-embodiment, it is proper to analyze the activities of such quasi-embodiments within the synthetic world (as they are simply people in an unfamiliar environment), with the intent to show that the institutions that have developed within the synthetic world, taken together, could denote the emergence of civilization.

Institutions within the Synthetic World

“Even in its simplest forms on the animal level, play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex. [...] It is a significant function—that is to say, there is some sense to it. All play means something.”
—Johan Huizanga (Homo Ludens 1)

At first it may seem absurd to propose that the activities within a video game could possibly denote the emergence of unique civilization, since after all, video games are not only a direct product of our existing civilization, but also, as games, are designed for their play-content. Indeed, how could a form of entertainment catered to members of an existing society in itself inspire an entirely incomparable macrocosm?

However, it is not only possible for some form of play to evolve into its own created civilization; according to Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizanga in his book Homo Ludens (“Man the Player”), play is a necessary prerequisite for the emergence of civilization, demanding that “civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a babe detaching itself from the womb; it arises in and as play, and never leaves it” (173). He justifies such a hefty conclusion first by realizing that play (in its basic forms) can exist independently of civilization (as manifested in young, playful dogs) and then by analyzing how the fundamental institutions of civilization all enjoy their origins from some practice of play:

- Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play. Wisdom and philosophy found expression in words and forms derived from religious contests [a consequence of play]. The rules of warfare, the conventions of noble living were built up on play-patterns. (173)

It is thus quite clear that indeed our civilization is built upon activity which must be regarded as some manifestation of play. A more particular interest to this paper pertains to what kind, or what characteristics, of play can lead to the emergence of civilization. Huizanga outlines this problem in Homo Ludens as well, citing five specific aspects of play which govern its ability to produce civilization, and these relevant Main Characteristics of Play (enumerated) are as follows:

I. Play is free, superfluous; play is done at leisure. (8)
II. Play is not ‘ordinary’ or ‘real’ life. It is rather a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. (8)
III. Play is executed within certain limits of time and place. (9)
IV. Play creates order, is order... Play demands order absolute and supreme. (10)
V. Play promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy... (13)
It is not difficult to realize that engagement in MMORPG games easily fits all of these necessary criteria; thus with the additional understanding of how an entertainment medium can directly effectuate a significant civilizational system, the specific institutions within MMORPGs will be explored. The following analyses are constructed under the realization that there are two components that shape the synthetic world: the programming decisions and lore that are created by the game design team, and the specific inclinations and activities of the participants within the world; that is, some of the institutions within the synthetic world are simply functionalities included by the makers of the game (for instance, a currency exists because it was put there) while other institutions have arisen independently of the programmers’ expectations.

Social Structures and In-Game Interaction

The social structures of most modern MMORPGs are quite intricate, both because of the provided functionality (by synthetic world designers) to allow for such organization, as well as the attempts by avatars themselves that unintentionally mimic real-world societal trends.

Although sometimes anecdotal, there have been many cases where synthetic society became the host for a gamer’s dominant social interactions, when the gamer will even exchange contact information with other avatars, meeting or talking in the tangible world as a supplement to the synthetic world, just as friends in the tangible world often choose to play together in synthetic worlds (Synthetic Worlds 117). In fact, according to Nick Yee in his study “Love is in the Air,” about 22% of male players and 50% of female players have developed romantic feelings for another player, while 8% of males and 29% of females admitted to physically dating someone they met in an MMORPG. Also cited in Castronova’s findings, there have been many cases of avatars who met in the synthetic world becoming absolutely inseparable in-game, and then chose to get married out-of-game to formally proclaim this union in the tangible world; although this is largely anecdotal, Yee produced data citing that about 10% of male players and 33% of female players have married online (and around 23% of males and 40% of females feel that getting married online is more meaningful than it is silly) (“Ethnography of MMORPG weddings”).

Likewise, funerals have been held in-game for deaths of the gamers who were playing well-known avatars, where the avatar’s name was used in the “funeral” with reverence. One funeral (which was held by a World of Warcraft guild, and irreverently “crashed” by a rival guild) was video-recorded, then spread through the player base, and even inspired (tangible-world) news articles such as The Real and the Semi-Real by Joe Rybicki on 1up.com’s Gamer News database. Although such cases of marriages and funerals are to an extent anecdotal and are lacking thorough studies, these occurrences show the adaptation of institutions dear to the tangible world into equivalences within the synthetic.

The characteristics of MMORPGs themselves play a crucial role in the other emerging social institutions; in particular, the massive multiplayer aspect of MMORPGs becomes pertinent within the challenges that synthetic worlds pose to avatars as a result of the lore (like the story of the Night Elves fighting the Burning Legion that Adamagic heard) that is deeply rooted in its synthetic structure. For example, most synthetic worlds feature many dungeons (caves, castles, motherships, fortresses) with bosses lurking inside of them that represent key enemies, or allow players to join as soldiers in the
battles of the ancients (as in *World of Warcraft, Everquest*). Specific in-game encounters, dungeons, wars, etc. often need different (cooperating) compositions of specialized avatars (heavy-combat fighters, ranged attackers, healers), and are tuned for as wide-ranging of group sizes as pure solo play to cooperations of over two hundred avatars.

Since such a high degree of cooperation is required for game participation, it is understandable for avatars to form organizations that commonly play together. All modern MMORPGs allow for the creation of *guilds* (sometimes under different names such as *clans*), which are formal organizations of avatars united under a consistent cause or goal, although not necessarily just for dungeon-fighting, as discussed. The specific motivations for creating guilds vary widely; in addition to progressing through the lore-driven content, guilds can also represent an in-game band of gamers that are friends out-of-game and enjoy playing together, or even can represent an alliance for economic purposes, such as control of a certain market or resource (to be discussed later). In most MMORPGs, avatars can belong to only one guild, and the guild name is often included in the identification of avatars (Morris). The administrative structure of the guild is highly malleable, and thus it is the duty of individual avatars to develop their own political systems.

Additionally, Rob Pardo, the lead designer of the *World of Warcraft* in an interview reproduced in *The Book of Games*, cites that some guilds (dubbed *überguilds*) resemble modern high-societal or exclusive clubs, as they are extraordinarily restrictive and often do not even publicly supply member lists; furthermore, the proceedings of these überguilds set standards for the rest of the synthetic world, and are often the subject of gamer-driven discussion or conversations between avatars. Articles such as GameSpy’s “Uber-guild beats Lich King” even arise on fan sites for communities to read, to analyze, and to draw conclusions about the condition of the synthetic society.

Furthermore, the mere connection that an avatar creates with his guild, since unmotivated by the game design team, provides evidence of human qualities shaping parallel institutions between the tangible and synthetic worlds. In a paper by Johnson et al., it was found that the patterns of guild organizations are entirely consistent with the patterns of organization of Los Angeles gangs, including the dominance of powerful gangs, the insistence on eliteness by a selective number, and the existence of others for the sole purpose of satisfying the avatar’s (gamer’s?) sense of belonging. Interestingly, the study also cites that individual shards (such as Korgath, in Adamagic’s case) seem to “play an equivalent role to gang ethnicity,” as the exact patterns that vary between gangs by race match those between guilds by server. The paper concludes that “online guilds and offline gangs are both driven by team-formation considerations rather than like-seeing-like”; are such considerations a result of natural human tendencies, or of social norms that have spilled over from the tangible world?

This question in fact necessarily reappears in response to all the different (relevant) institutional studies; so before attempting to answer it, it is important to realize the other contexts in which this question manifests, to perhaps stage the attempted answer from a nonspecific perspective.

**In-Game Economics: A Wealth of Activity**

As Edward Castronova the economist declares, “the economies of [synthetic] worlds, as a matter of fact, are not just ‘functioning like a genuine economy’: they are
a genuine economy” (Synthetic Worlds 173). To understand the striking similarities between the economies of synthetic worlds and that of the tangible, consider this journal entry from an Everquest gamer dated April 26th, 2001 and reproduced in Castronova’s Virtual Worlds (both the city of “Rivervale”/“rv” and the “Misty Thicket” are places within Norrath, Everquest’s synthetic world):

i made a killing in misty acorns. you can pick these up from the ground in misty thicket. i was in rivervale one day and some lady was paying 8 pp per acorn. that’s a lot of money. she told me it was for half-ling armor. ok, whatever. so i started making a habit of picking them up whenever i saw one, then walking into rv and selling them to rich people. they would rather spend that kind of money than wander around looking for acorns. classic economics—my comparative advantage in foraging leads to exchange. and now i can buy a nice hat.

Every synthetic world has its own version of a currency, and will be henceforth referred to as “synthetic gold.” Synthetic gold can be acquired by avatars in a number of ways, such as by completing in-game “quests” posed by various factions, by fulfilling bounties, by selling acquired items to in-game “merchants” that return a default exchange value for all items, and by trading items specifically useful to other players in exchange for synthetic gold (Synthetic Worlds 182-189). Likewise, synthetic gold can not only be used to trade for other items, but is often required to repair an avatar’s own armor after extensive use, paying fees on in-game transportation systems, and pay for services given by other avatars (either to a more experienced avatar for help, or an avatar with a specific profession, etc)—and any such transactions among avatars is consistent with free-market economies, as there are very rarely restrictions on trade amounts.

On this last point, as Castronova and GameRates both explore, MMORPGs often allow avatars to train themselves in professions or tradeskills, which improve in skill (and allow for the creation of increasingly powerful items or increasingly faster gathering or production) as the profession is practiced (that is, utilized for production of goods or gathering of resources). Examples of gathering professions include Herbalism or Skinning (World of Warcraft) to Mining or Woodcutting (Runescape) to Foraging and Fishing (Everquest), and such professions are practiced by literally picking herbs, skinning animal corpses, mining iron ore out of mines, and so on within the synthetic world. As these resources are not usually directly useful to avatars in their raw form, secondary professions such as Alchemy, Leatherworking, Blacksmithing, and so forth exist to compile raw materials into useful items for players (potions, leather armor, weapons). Thus, as is consistent with real-world economics, there are both resource markets and product markets which, taken together, influence global price markets of both synthetic items and in-game currency. Furthermore, when different rare patterns (“plans,” “schematics,” “recipes,” etc) for secondary professions are obtained by skilled (or lucky) avatars, there may be a sudden rise in demand for the materials used to produce the rare item that is now available—with an additional bonus to this lucky craftsman; hence there is also a Supply & Demand sector of the in-game market.

Because of this economic circulation, synthetic gold maintains a value almost exactly like the currencies of the tangible-world, and there is protection supplied for both the gold and the goods. The synthetic worlds themselves have a system by which to report “scammed” or stolen goods within the world (such as if a craftsman agreed
to smith a sword, was given the materials by a fellow avatar, but then just ran off with the materials), and will be investigated (by paid tangible-world game regulators) just as would happen in the tangible world. Interestingly, since it is possible to create a permanent log of all synthetic-world activity, the regulation of such crime in the synthetic world is far superior to that of the tangible, a development which is both fascinating and frightful.6

Furthermore, since much of the in-game trade directly involves synthetic gold, there is a constant want of the gamer to acquire more synthetic gold for his avatar, and there has arisen a tangible-world market for doing so. Although the synthetic worlds themselves ban such real-world monetary trades of in-game goods (through the Terms of Service that Adamagic had to consent to) for various reasons,7 it is hard to regulate them (as such a trade appears as a friendly donation, in-game, although sometimes fishy) with too high of a risk of false conviction, among other difficulties.

As early as 2005, Castronova cites that eBay has a section devoted entirely for in-game goods, which involves not only currency exclusively, but also the actual raw materials or products involved in tradeskills, and even rare items (which are then clearly “bought” with tangible-world money) (Synthetic Worlds 149). GameRates, a site devoted exclusively for synthetic-world goods trading, also maintains an updated list of credible synthetic-world goods vendors (excluding eBay) as well as an economically accurate conversion rate for each major synthetic-world currency to U.S. dollars. Thus it is possible for individuals to start (tangible-world) companies that acquire in-game goods and sell them for (tangible-world) profits, and, according to Castronova and Bloodspite,8 such practices are strikingly prominent in Asia, among other places (in fact, such a corporation “My MMO Shop” was even bought out by another for $10 million (US)--which could just have readily been converted to synthetic gold).

As a result, synthetic-world economies have a considerable impact on the tangible world. As Castronova explores in his paper “Virtual Worlds,” such synthetic-good companies (primarily in Asia) pay low hourly rates for workers to control avatars that harvest in-game goods (similar to sweat-shops). Furthermore, financial analyst Pipar Jaffray estimates that U.S. citizens spent $621 million for synthetic goods or gold, and research firm Plus Eight Star puts the spending at $5 billion globally, for 2009 alone (Fleming). Dave Rosenberg, Chief American Economist of Bank of America, even predicts that these figures will continue to grow to $835 million in the U.S. in 2010 and $5.5 billion globally. Indeed, it is estimated in 2009 that the MMORPG Second-Life alone generates US$600 million per year worth of synthetic goods and services alone, exceeding the GDP of nineteen countries, and in all, Castronova estimates that synthetic worlds together will generate US$1.5 billion annually, and the “labors of the [synthetic-world] people produce a GNP per capita somewhere between that of Russia and Bulgaria” (Virtual Worlds). Additionally, a report by Nic Fleming on the New Scientist news website chronicles synthetic-world (monetary) disputes heading for tangible-world courtrooms, focusing in particular on the Asian MMORPG Second Life. Synthetic economies thus not only resemble the tangible economy, but also undeniably supplement it.

However, a few inconsistencies exist between synthetic economies and its tangible equivalent. First of all, as explored by Stang in his report of The Age of Conan in his book The Book of Games: Volume 2, synthetic economies exercise a “faucet-and-drain” economy, where synthetic currency is spontaneously created by the synthetic world it-
self (as avatars loot gold from defeated corpses, sell acquired loot or bounty to in-game merchants, etc), and is later spontaneously destroyed (as avatars repair their broken armor from in-game repairmen, die and have a portion of their wealth taken for compensation, etc) (223). As a result of such an economic system, effective design by the game developers themselves is necessary to maintain a functional currency, as there need to be enough sinks to balance out the inflow from monetary sources, as otherwise inflation would imminently ensue according to basic economic theories; indeed, because this is so pertinent to gameplay, the design team does work to maintain a balanced system (cited from Castronova the economist himself in his introduction to Synthetic Worlds).

Second, there is a lack of tertiary economic activity that is manifested thoroughly in developed tangible economies. The bankers in synthetic worlds are NPCs (non-player characters) and all money is handled without the gamers’ efforts, thus entirely reducing the necessity for such tertiary positions.

Third, the merchant NPCs that inhabit the synthetic worlds often offer extraordinarily low prices for goods that avatars are attempting to sell, compared to goods that the avatars would wish to buy from the same NPCs (Synthetic Worlds 190). That is, merchants appear to have access to two global markets simultaneously, “one where the price is high and the other where it is low, and the twain never meet to arbitrage away that price difference.” If this inconsistency with tangible-world economics did not exist, avatars could develop more intricate systems of imports and exports between in-game merchant regions. Castronova studies solutions for this inconsistency, analyzing the economic significance of each, and showing in particular how merchant activity, if given more carefully monitored pricing systems, could effectively introduce discretionary fiscal policy (194).

Lastly, as explored by Andrew from GameRates, there is a Mudflational (developed as early as the days of MUDs: Multi-User Dungeons mentioned earlier) component to many synthetic economies, that is defined as the inflation of currency that results when avatars all reach their highest skill potentials; at this level, it is designed to be easier to acquire money for everybody at this level of mastery, and additionally such large gold piles have a concentrated focus on few, specific, high-end materials and goods. That is, once a multitude of players have all developed an almost all-inclusive mastery of a tradeskill, there will not be much wealth-acquisition difference between them in this profession (by design), but their prosperity is meant to represent a maximum; likewise, players shift their attention from the lesser markets, causing much of a profession’s output to lose its value. (GameRates)

Of course, this mudflation component to many synthetic economies is specifically a result of the limited expansionary potential of the programmed professions; that is, if professions could be developed in-game to facilitate the production of blueprints for goods, such that not all practitioners of the profession could obtain the recipe, mudflation would cease to exist (as, for example, lower-quality goods could still be engineered to produce high-quality products, provided an avatar developed a sufficient method). This customizable economic system was developed in Second Life, as explored earlier, which allows an avatar to literally “buy virtual land and build [his] dream house, open [his] own business, create an amusement park or assemble a space station.” Second Life allows users to express their creativity by actually physically manipulating the synthetic world around them; even though the MMORPG does not inherently contain a lot of
the combat styles popular in the genre, there are environments and rules that users have designed within the world, as well as their own localized combat-rich versions of “mini-MMORPGs,” to truly destroy the economic inconsistencies which exist in most other MMORPGs.

Furthermore, the economic system resulting from economic inconsistencies of MMORPGs is an important development to the utility of synthetic worlds; that is, they can be used as a medium of experimentation for different economic systems (such as the faucet-and-drain economy, or limited professional growth) to explore potential problems or repercussions (such as mudflation) which could not have been easily deduced simply from predictive analysis.

Therefore, especially with as accurate of an economic model as that in Second Life, as Castronova posits, synthetic economies can be used to investigate possible real-world economic policy (Virtual Worlds). In fact, economic policy of the tangible world is beginning to be understood more completely under the context of its synthetic twins. This idea has even inspired popular satirical news sites online, as the Onion News chronicles that on February 16, 2010, Federal Reserve Chairman of the U.S., Ben Bernanke, explicitly illustrated to Americans that US dollars, in concept, are nothing more than pieces of paper whose value is determined through conventional usage, just like synthetic gold and its associated exchange rate. This simple proclamation of money as “just an illusion” supposedly left Senate members, lawmakers, and members of the press “[running] for the exits, leaving in their wake aisles littered with the remains of torn currency,” and as word spread nationwide for this realization, the American economy reportedly “ground to a halt”. Of course, neither the testimony about the state of the American economy that Bernanke shared that day nor the frantic response of the nation were as drastic as the Onion reported, but Bernanke’s testimony did actually discuss some of the relevant properties of money in modern society. Such a report by the Federal Reserve Chairman of the U.S. was of no insight to gamers familiar with their synthetic worlds, as they already knew that currency is virtual.

Economics has developed in the synthetic world in a system that parallels the tangible, allowing for extensive experimental research; furthermore, is this in-game economic activity exclusively a result of the avatars’ needs and values by nature, or simply a reappearance of the existing economics of the tangible-world, proliferated by knowledgeable gamers (through their avatars)?

Synthetic Medical Systems: A Clear Deficiency

The topic of medical systems is included to show a particular crucial inconsistency between synthetic society and tangible society. Because the avatar in the synthetic world is actually controlled by a gamer in the tangible world, it is currently impossible to have institutions in the synthetic that truly replace the necessity of survival in the tangible. However, every game still has food and water (and methods of rest) available in-game which grant the avatar certain restorative benefits, although awfully unnecessary (or negligible) to the game experience. There are many simulated health problems, which require various methods of cure (including in-game medics or some capable avatars), but most likely because of the requirement that video games have to be fun, serious health deficiencies like those in the tangible world do not exist in MMORPGs, destroying the current possibility for an emergent synthetic medical system. A detailed reproduction
of the debate on the acceptance of in-game medical problems is provided by Bartle in his book *Designing Virtual Worlds*, with a focus on permanent (in-game) death; he ultimately concludes that gamers are against such measures purely because of the fun-factor (416-460).

The Remainder of Synthetic Worlds

Of course, there are other quite fascinating institutions which also have appeared in the synthetic worlds. Politics is inherent both in the fundamental status of avatars, as they represent a variety of different classes or races (such as Adamagic’s *Night Elf Priest*) which could be either *too powerful* or *too weak* compared to others, and in the discussed social structures that emerged, such as the administration of guilds and the patterns of acceptance by überguilds, or the allowance of gay marriage of avatars (GamePolitics.com). Culture is manifested in many ways as well, both out-of-game (such as the gamer websites that presented the articles and blogs previously mentioned, *1up.com* or *GameSpy*) and in-game (in the lore, quests, player decisions, faction alignment, small talk in the streets of *Darnassus*). It is not hard to realize how these results could be a consequence of both the functionalities provided by the synthetic-world designers and the actions of the individual avatars, but for the sake of brevity will not be explored thoroughly.

Conclusions

So now we return to the question: are these in-game developments a result of natural human tendencies, or of social norms that have spilled over from the tangible world?

This inquiry is reminiscent of the 17th and 18th century philosophical Enlightenment developments. In his *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke attempted to understand the same questions concerning human condition in its natural state, including the meaning of value and property, the natural state of being “equal,” social contract theory, and the other reasons for the necessary emergence of society. Likewise, Rousseau explored the development of human society as a corrupting process, delving back to the properties of man in his natural state in his *Discourse on Inequality*. Perhaps the fundamental components of MMORPGs can thus be used to provide insight into this still popular philosophical debate: for what reasons did our current Western societal system develop? Was there necessarily some heavenly decree which motivated the emergence of societal systems, as Sir Robert Filmer claims in his *Patriarcha*, or are there inherently faculties and desires of the mind that predictably cause an effective system to develop? Is our current tangible-world system in fact corrupting, or is it the most ideal?

Synthetic worlds, given their ability to express ideas of the gamer directly through his synthetic quasi-embodiment, could serve as a medium of understanding for the Enlightenment philosophers. However, as discussed, the functionalities included by the programming of the synthetic world, such as currencies, NPC bankers, explicit class creation, defined professions, in their current state by no means could answer these questions, and if they were void in *all* such inklings of the civilized world, the study of avatars in a synthetic wasteland is no more revealing than the study of humans in a tangible wasteland.

What synthetic worlds *can* do, however, is provide a way to literally program certain altered *conditions* or remove certain developments existing in the tangible world from an otherwise effective mirror of the tangible world as a synthetic world, and then
allow the participants to perform their natural inclinations for the sake of observing the resulting civilizational systems that develop, provided they are not “corrupted” by their current (tangible-world) perceptions of the altered processes. On this last point, it is entirely difficult to attract a large body of individuals who could thus participate in the synthetic worlds while still being ignorant of the entirety of their social conditions. To understand what I am suggesting, consider an example of international trade regulations. If researchers (philosophers, economists, etc.) wanted to understand the motivations for the development of trade regulations, a synthetic world could be created similar to the tangible but lacking in nothing but explicit methods of trade between inhabitants (and the associated policies), while maintaining economic dependencies, and populated by avatars who were entirely inept in the concepts and specifics of international trade. The synthetic world would then allow the observers to track the emerging trade patterns; with the assistance of careful design and preparation by a programming team, certain aspects of modern civilization, although probably not the civilization as a whole, can be “relived” from a natural origin to understand, from a Lockean perspective, how or why the current system has developed.

On a more immediately practical level, MMORPGs can already be used to test certain tangible-world phenomena in a controlled setting, with participants being actual representatives of the societies where the phenomena could occur. As already explored, a faucet-and-drain economy can be tested with real people for benefits (where, for example, a large money pool can represent both the faucet and the drain); although not truly useful (since the system has flaws), the existence of such a simulation proves the relevant utility.

Shockingly, MMORPGs have been used to observe the spread of disease. In the infamous Corrupted Blood incident in World of Warcraft, a certain (high-end) enemy inflicted individuals with a damage-over-time “disease” called Corrupted Blood, which would slowly kill avatars over time (and could not be cured prematurely, so the avatar had to be treated through the duration of its infliction by those with the capability to prevent death); additionally, the disease would spread to nearby avatars. Although the disease was intended to be a local challenge, whether intentionally or unintentionally, a few avatars in various shards managed to “teleport” back to main cities while still inflicted—thus spreading the infection to others in the city. In at least three different shards, the Corrupted Blood became an epidemic; those unfamiliar with the disease would unintentionally spread it to others. Professor Nina Fefferman of Tufts University School of Medicine even insists that “the players seemed to really feel they were at risk and took the threat of infection seriously” (BBC News). Many with the capability to heal reacted to the event by healing those they could in an attempt to sustain as many as possible, while some without the capabilities tried to spread the word to instruct those that were inflicted (or could be inflicted) how to react upon contact. The event has been paralleled in innumerable many aspects to the HIV infections of our tangible world, where the reactions of the individuals in the synthetic worlds, as well as the patterns of the spread of the disease itself, were almost entirely consistent. Dr. Gary Smith, professor of Population Biology and Epidemiology at the University of Pennsylvania, praises the incident, as “very few [simulations] of disease transmission take host behaviour into account.”

Furthermore, during this same Corrupted Blood incident, as some gamers learned how to cause the most damage to the largest number of avatars, they were perfectly simu-
lating the activities of tangible-world terrorists. Charles Blair, deputy director of the US Center for Terrorism and Intelligence Studies, respects the fiasco as a “powerful new way to study how terrorist cells form and operate,” according to Wired News, recognizing that “Warcraft involves ‘real’ people making real decisions in a world with some kind of [controllable] bounds.” Thus synthetic worlds can, even in their current state, serve as an accurate model for certain tangible-world events of concern to society, with undeniable practical applications.

Finally, do we not essentially have the capability to engineer our first attempt at a Matrix? It could not possibly be too technologically difficult to affix participants of a world to an intravenous machine also synchronized with the synthetic world, so that participation (or events) within the game would actually nourish the gamer’s body to sustain the avatar’s existence in the synthetic world (since synthetic-world goods and products already can be traded for real-world equivalents via exchange rates). Additionally, given that there are already MMORPGs like Second Life where users can express their creativities and desires with very few limitations in-game, is it possible to exhibit a system which exists to develop a personal utopia? Ultimately, since every aspect of a synthetic world is programmable, down to the gravity that holds the avatars to the ground, do humans finally have their shot at playing God at the moment of Creation of the universe?

Endnotes
1 The game was sometimes simply called Advent because file names on the computers of the time period were limited to 6 characters.
2 Where massive, in the case of the popular MMORPG World of Warcraft, means up to 30,000 players playing together simultaneously, and 80,000 on Second Life.
3 Notice that, given these reported proportions, some gamers in the survey must have believed that they live both inside and outside Norrath.
4 On his definition of play, Huizanga writes “It is ancient wisdom, but it is also a little cheap, to call all human activity ‘play.’ Those who are willing to content themselves with a metaphysical conclusion of this kind should not read this book” (Homo Ludens Foreword). Thus he uses the word in the practical sense, i.e. activity that incites entertainment.
5 Some MMORPGs actually provide the functionality to literally celebrate a marriage ceremony in a church, with a complete service, invitations, and written records of the event.
6 The ultimate “Big Brother” capabilities seem to be emerging here, as the system that runs the world is literally able to maintain a record of every single action performed by anybody.
7 There is a strong dispute here expressed against virtual property: if a gamer spends many hours collecting (synthetic) acorns on his avatar, do those acorns belong to the gamer, or to the game (i.e., the company that produced and runs the game)? Of course if all in-game items were property of the company, they would be of no use to anyone but the company, and would be worthless.
8 Bloodspite is a Field & Support manager for R&R Solutions, a technological solutions company and partner to such companies as HP, IBM, and Dell, identifying himself under a gaming alias.
9 The three proposed solutions are “(1) Get rid of merchant AI [artificial intelligence—that is, the ability for the merchants to change prices based on situation] (2) Explicitly model this global market, its prices, and the access of merchant bots (and players) to it. (3) Get rid of the global market assumption and hence limit the willingness of merchant bots to buy and sell goods.”


ESSAYS FROM THE

Introduction to the Humanities

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Boothe Prize Winners & Honorable Mentions
INTRODUCTION

The courses that make up the Introduction to the Humanities (IHUM) program present Stanford freshmen with opportunities to engage with significant issues, themes, and ideas concerning human identity and existence. Students select from a wide range of offerings specifically designed for the first year of college. Distinguished faculty members address these topics in lectures, and students explore them further in discussion sections and writing assignments. The success of IHUM students’ writing represented by the Boothe Prize winning essays in this volume validates the decision to organize freshman humanities in terms of freedom of choice rather than a single canon. 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 diverse range of subjects. The winning essays engage with a wide array of texts, from Dante’s *Inferno* to August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson*, and demonstrate a broad disciplinary range, from archaeology to the intersection of philosophy and classics. The Boothe essays, in keeping with the goals of IHUM, ask fundamental humanistic questions about the metaphoric meanings of marriage, the nature of faith, and the legitimacy of law. This extraordinary sweep is indicative of the breadth of the long tradition of liberal arts education at Stanford. We congratulate the Boothe Prize winners for 2009–10, 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 humanistic learning that flourish during students’ first year at Stanford.

—RUSSELL A. BERMAN  
Director, Introduction to the Humanities Program

—ELLEN WOODS  
Co-Director, Stanford Introductory Studies
The “World Archaeology and Global Heritage” IHUM examines written documents, oral histories and heritage sites as primary texts. Learning to read archaeological sites as texts requires consideration of the complex and often conflicted social processes that helped produce texts and artifacts. It also demands attention to how different stakeholders’ relationships to a site affect their diverse, often divergent, interpretations of it.

Fiona Hinze’s paper is a response to an important Bay Area heritage sites: Angel Island. Between 1910 and 1940, Angel Island stood as the “Guardian of the Western Gate,” a stark contrast to Ellis Island and its more welcoming stance towards Europe. Over 500,000 immigrants of diverse nationalities passed through Angel Island.

Hinze’s paper stood out for the sensitive and original way she integrated her direct observations of this heritage site with documentary evidence and personal history to analyze the role of history in shaping identity, as well as the complexities involved in the curation of material heritage for the public. While preservation efforts emphasized the importance of detainees’ poetry, and therefore creativity and immigrant resilience at Angel Island, Hinze argues instead that silence itself is a key part of this particular human story. She diverges from much of the existing literature on the legacy of detention, because it construes silence primarily as a sign of immigrant shame. Hinze asks the reader to consider the more fraught, complex and potentially contradictory meanings of silence about history – whether on the part of the participants in that history, or those commemorating it. She argues for the power of law, specifically the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and subsequent anti-Asian laws, in making Chinese immigrants into the first “illegals.” Criminalization and racialization reinforced the social and cultural status of Asian Americans as eternally alien, and in turn decisions survivors make about, if, and how to talk about their experiences, and even how they may position themselves in relation to debates over citizenship and immigration today. This move in turn prompts the reader to consider how contemporary policies and attitudes about race and immigration may appear to our descendents, one hundred years from now.

—KATHY COLL
I am a fifth-generation Chinese Californian, but am the first in my family born in the United States. The name my great-grandfather used in the United States was not his real name. Both of these facts are a direct reflection of the history of Chinese immigration to the United States. This history is based in part on illegal attempts to evade racist exclusionary laws and the resulting lingering fear of discovery that led generations to avoid discussion of what their forebearers endured in order to successfully immigrate. This fear led to a silence; my grandfather only mentioned his father’s detention on Angel Island once. As I arrived at Angel Island Immigration Station, I expected that the site’s interpretive materials and exhibits would address the reasons for this silence. However, while the presentation of the site does separate the Chinese experience from the plurality of other immigrant groups who passed through the island, it does not inform the casual visitor as to why the Chinese were treated differently, indeed why they amongst all groups suffered such prolonged detention. It fails to provide the background necessary to understand the unique circumstances of Chinese immigration: the role of Angel Island as perilous threshold that could often only be crossed through the use of an illegal fiction, and the years of silence that that fiction engendered.

Much of the literature that discusses Chinese immigration cites shame, or the bitterness of unpleasant memories, in explaining the silence of the older generations of Chinese immigrants regarding their Angel Island experience (Lai 1991: 28). These authors posit that the immigrants are ashamed of having been detained, incarcerated, and interrogated, and that the embarrassment of this experience accounts for their years of silence thereafter. However, this explanation ignores a salient feature of Chinese immigration after 1882: that many Chinese immigrants between 1882 and the Second World War entered the United States illegally, under false pretenses.

The initial response of the European Americans in California to Chinese immigration was paradoxical; even Leland Stanford, who profited from Chinese labor, campaigned against Chinese immigration in his political career. With the approach of the new century, anti-Chinese sentiment grew, particularly during economic downturns (Voss 2008:10,11). Chinese immigrants were viewed as a “Yellow Peril” that threatened the economic security and cultural integrity of European Americans (Lowe 1996:4). After the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in 1882, only sons of citizens and merchants could enter the United States from China (Lai 1991:12). With the destruction of government citizenship records after the 1906 earthquake, many Chinese men in America successfully, though falsely, claimed to be native-born citizens (AIISF). These men then traveled to China for visits and, upon their return to the United States, falsely claimed that new sons had been born to their wives in order to obtain official identification documents (Lai 1991:47). Years later, these American citizens would sell these identification documents to unrelated young men who would use them to enter the
The Chinese referred to these fraudulent immigrants as “paper sons” (Lai 1991:44). These “paper sons” therefore entered the United States under assumed names, names that they often used for the rest of their lives. For example, my great-grandfather’s real name was Chan Mun Suy, but his “paper son” name, and the name now on his tombstone, was Chan Quong.

The United States government adopted stringent procedures to identify “paper sons.” Unlike European immigrants, who passed through Ellis Island in less than a day, Chinese immigrants on Angel Island were held for days, weeks, and even years. They were subjected to detailed, repeated, minute interrogations about their “paper” family and village. The goal of the immigration officials was to catch the immigrants in inconsistent responses, as compared to either their own prior testimony or that of other immigrants from the same village (AIISF). These inconsistencies would then form the basis for the applicant’s deportation. In anticipation of this intensive questioning, prospective “paper sons” studied detailed coaching books that contained minute details of their reputed family, home life, and village (Lai 1991: 20). As the website of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation notes, deviation in a detainee’s testimony put him, and possibly everyone else in his family, at risk for deportation. Thereafter, because of the risk of random immigration raids, identity card checks, and the need to maintain his status in order to make return visits to China, a “paper son” had to maintain the fiction of his identity throughout his life (AIISF). Also, Chinese-Americans were required to carry a “Certificate of Residence” at all times (Yu 2001: 17). Failure to carry this certificate could subject a Chinese resident to summary deportation (Voss 2008: 12). As a consequence, Chinese immigrant men during the years of the Exclusion Act never felt safe, never felt that their history of fraudulent immigration was behind them.

The lifelong shadow of the “paper son” past is, however, not presented to visitors to Angel Island. At the main Angel Island visitor’s center at Ayala Cove, the sole mention of the Immigration Station is the following, under the caption “Poetry on Wooden Walls”:

The federal government opened a new immigration station on Angel Island’s north shore. Because of racial exclusion laws in effect since 1882, Asian immigrants were held for lengthy interrogations to prove their identity before they could enter the country. Locked in barracks for weeks, months, or even years, they recorded their frustration and anguish in poetry still visible on the wooden walls.

This initial introduction to the site fails to distinguish among the plurality of migrant experiences on Angel Island. The sign refers to “Asian immigrants,” but not all immigrants of Asian origin had the same experience. The prolonged detention of Chinese immigrants was the result of the Exclusion Act, which applied exclusively to those of Chinese origin. In contrast, the Act did not apply to immigrants from Japan. Instead, the United States had treaty agreements with Japan regarding immigration. Japanese immigrants held documents provided by their government that expedited the process of entering the country (AIISF). Thus, the majority of detainees were Chinese.

At the immigration station itself, the signage installed this year acknowledges the diversity of national groups that passed through the station, but appropriately focuses on the unique circumstances of Chinese immigrants. Initial signage directs the visitor to the pier at the bottom of the hill. From there a series of terraces rise to the barracks
building. The first sign on the terrace that specifically refers to the Chinese immigration experience is the “Detention Barracks” sign on the second terrace level, which states:

Because of the restrictive exclusion laws, Chinese immigrants were detained the longest. Some of them carved poetry into the barracks walls to voice their opinions or lament their fate.

This sign does not provide an explanation of the “restrictive exclusion laws” and their relationship to the detention of Chinese immigrants. As a visitor progresses up the terraces, other signs provide information about the detainees’ deplorable living conditions, and the racist attitudes of some of the immigration station employees, but provide no information about why Chinese in particular were detained.

As a visitor enters the display area inside Room 105 of the barracks, the inscriptions on the walls are dramatically illuminated. A brochure available just to the left of the entry, “Voices in the Wooden House,” discusses the inscriptions in detail, with examples, but refers only briefly to “incarceration” and “imprisonment” without further explanation.

The first display board a visitor encounters, “Guardians of the West,” bears the subtitle “Enforcing Laws Based on Unfounded Fears,” and states, in part, “Exclusion and deportation were very real fears, regardless of ethnicity….Chinese immigrants were the majority of those denied entry.” However, no specific discussion is offered of why Chinese immigrants, in particular, were denied entry. The reverse side of this display panel, “Growing Pains,” mentions that the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was enacted in response to anti-Chinese sentiment, but does not explain why exclusion led to prolonged detention of subsequent immigrants on Angel Island; this is in contrast to the website of the Angel Island Association, which discusses the “paper son” concept, and which explains why the practice of using a fraudulent identity to evade the restrictions of the Exclusion Act resulted in prolonged detention and interrogation (AIA). Similarly, while the website of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation itself also discusses “paper sons,” the signs at the barracks do not (AIISF).

While Chinese immigrants shared some of the experiences common to all Asian immigrants during the period of the Exclusion Act, the unique, pointed anti-Chinese racism of the Act, and the means developed to elude its restrictions, resulted in salient differences from the experiences of other national groups. These differences had lasting consequences. For example, while the Japanese-American internment experience during World War II resulted in a generation of silence due to feelings of shame and betrayal, the Chinese experience of immigration detention resulted in generations of silence due, in part, to a lingering fear of subsequent discovery and deportation. Although a racist law unfairly discriminated against Chinese immigrants, the fact remains that the forebearers of many families entered this country as illegal immigrants, using a fraudulent identity. Perhaps in response to ongoing controversies in our nation concerning undocumented immigrants of many origins, the displays at the immigration station fail to tell the full story of the “paper sons.” As such, the silence continues.
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The title of Mia Newman’s inventive and nuanced essay, “Under the Yoke: The Institution of Marriage in Middlemarch,” might suggest that what follows is a traditional critique: epitomized in the misfortunes of heroine Dorothea Brooke, marriage promotes constraint if not subjection. Through sophisticated prose and forceful argumentation, Mia’s essay goes far beyond such claims, seeing in Eliot’s favored symbol—the yoke—a more complicated portrait of how two people come together in marriage. As Mia astutely notes, if a yoke subjects its wearers, that restraint is not unilateral. Husband does not subject wife, nor vice versa; rather, both are forced into a state of equality. In other words, the yoke suggests that it is not simply submission, but rather the “equality” it requires, that is the problem—a problem, that is, if it is the ambitious Lydgate wedded to the facile Rosamond, or Dorothea to the corpse-like Casaubon. In this way, the yoke marks an “inversion of the traditional hierarchy of submission, in which the inferior yields to the superior; in these yoked marriages, submission is still an act that demeans one, but it is the superior who is demeaned.” For Mia, the most fascinating aspect of this constraint is that it is chosen. Confronted not only with traditional hierarchies of gender, but also with the distancing emotions that their marriages have provoked—fear, pity—Lydgate and Dorothea willingly submit in the hopes of recapturing a lost ideal.

The subtle analysis presented in this essay is the result of a series of strengths, first and foremost the ability to read with sensitivity, creativity, and insight. These achievements are all the more impressive given the material. George Eliot is an extraordinarily complex writer, and a significant challenge for all readers, let alone freshmen; Mia rose to the task with aplomb. Sustained throughout with elegant and commanding prose, this essay offers a compelling and original look at Eliot’s intricate portrait of human relations.

—ABIGAIL HEALD
Under the Yoke

The Institution of Marriage in Middlemarch

Mia Newman

A yoke: a tool of the agricultural lifestyle, a wooden instrument of union. It commands cooperation, perhaps too strongly. Tying two together by the neck, it threatens strangulation if diverging directions are attempted. Although a form of bondage, it would seem at least to be an equal one, as both creatures are equally subdued by being inescapably linked to the other. However, George Eliot’s persistent use of the word “yoke” in Middlemarch seems to have little to do with equality. Instead, her yoke is a means of subjugating one to another, a critical abridgement of one character’s freedom in deference to the one to which it is tied. Throughout the novel, the “yoke” is an oft-repeated metaphor for the union of marriage, specifically one to which Dorothea and Lydgate refer in describing their married lives. In Eliot’s work, marriage is painted as a social institution that has limited the freedom of these otherwise vividly independent and strong-willed characters. Rather than binding two equals in marriage, the yoke forces an imbalance as well as a restriction of freedom. For these characters, however, such yoked submission is a difficult but essentially voluntary act of profound self-control that they perform in pursuit of greater personal ends.

Dorothea’s personal sacrifice comes as she nears the end of her marriage to Casaubon. By the end of their time together, little of her former hero-worship of this paragon of scholarship remains, and her relationship to him is largely characterized by pity. It is this pity that creates her yoke, the reason her “native strength of will was…all converted into resolute submission” (332) when she is with Casaubon. Her natural morality and strong sense of obligation lead her “pity [to be] turned from her own future to her husband’s past—nay, to his present hard struggle…and now at last the sword visibly trembling above him!” (297). Here she demonstrates that larger goal to which she almost surrenders her personal freedom and passionate soul: she weighs her knowledge of a future free from the burden of his life work with a future oppressed by the guilt of having abandoned him. Yet even with the knowledge of her destined wifely guilt, “she dreaded going to the spot where she foresaw that she must bind herself to a fellowship from which she shrank. Neither law nor the world’s opinion compelled her to this—only her husband’s nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage” (299). This distinction between the “ideal” and the “real yoke” reveals strikingly Dorothea’s very real quest for a perfect marriage, one in which she happily performs wifely duties because she has been tied to a man whose work she respects. This vision is contrasted sharply with the “real yoke of marriage” in which she is uncomfortably and physically tied to her husband. It would be the “ideal” yoke that would “compel” her to submit, however, not the “real” and public one, because her fervid idealism leads her to conform to the standards of a model marriage in the hopes that it would become her reality.
Lydgate, too, dreams of a perfect marriage, and it is the fear of dashing those dreams that lead to his yoke: a yoke that makes him submit to his wife out of the dread of future marital loneliness. The supreme act of self-control that fashioned his yoke is revealed in one of his and Rosamond’s fights, as “Lydgate was bowing his neck under the yoke like a creature who had talons, but who had Reason too, which often reduces us to meekness” (368). Lydgate could have chosen the high life of a soaring bird with the talons that enable independence, self-sufficiency, and strength, but instead his intelligence and will-power restrain him from potentially rash action. Eliot invites “us” all to sympathize with the man whose mind knows that the consequences of anything but submission could be emotionally and socially disastrous. As poverty strikes and the discontent between them grows, Lydgate perceives that “a fracture in delicate crystal had begun, and he was afraid of any movement that might make it fatal. His marriage would be a mere piece of bitter irony if they could not go on loving each other” (403). He seeks love through submission to the unexpectedly strong will of the creature to which he has inextricably bound himself through marriage. He knows that should his yoke break, the strong character which that yoke restrains would shatter the last of his hopes of a sweet marriage to an ideal wife. As long as he submits, he can continue living under the same illusion of a perfect marriage that Dorothea seeks; but as soon as the yoke ceases to control him, a “bitter” and “fatal” loneliness would ensue.

This loneliness is an important commonality between Dorothea’s and Lydgate’s yoked marriages. A vast emotional and mental distance from their partners characterizes the two protagonists’ relationships. Both seem to forge their yokes to compensate for this distance, hoping that by submitting to their spouses’ wills, they will be brought closer together. Dorothea had hoped initially that the bond of learning might unite her with her husband, but he respects her only in the role of secretary, not as a loving partner, and in doing so severs all hope of a deeper connection. To Dorothea, the lack of a union deeper than the marriage vows necessitates a yoke to hold them closer, though that closeness might require a suppression of her self. She articulates this emotional distance herself, observing “clearly in the miserable light…her own and her husband’s solitude—how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him. If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed him” (265). Because of the great distance between them, she is able to see his faults in a way she never expected; viewing him from afar lets her see the whole picture of his character instead of the individual scholarly traits she so admired, which leaves her open to Ladislaw’s skepticism of his pale cousin’s work (141). Even more than just leaving her vulnerable to a shattering of her vision of her husband, the distance “obliged” her to think less of him. Pity becomes her attempt to create a bond between them, a yoke that links them and prevents them from “walking apart” ever again. But pity is an inherently distancing emotion, one which implies a clear distinction between the pitied and the one who pities, a reaching out from the entity of “me” to the wholly separate pitied entity. Her yoke of pity, attempting to bridge that wide chasm but simultaneously embodying that chasm, was destined to fail from the start.

Eliot describes Lydgate’s distanced relationship from Rosamond in even more desperate language. More than two humans walking further away from each other, Rosamond and Lydgate are as mutually unintelligible as two entirely different animals, for “It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests” (369). They have as little in common as two
divergent species, who by definition do not have even enough common genetic material to mate with each other. Moreover, the same “opposing interests” that risk strangulation for two yoked oxen threaten the Lydgate marriage. Lydgate has sacrificed himself by yoking himself to her that they might form a happier future together, but she sees no mutual obligation to him. Instead, there is a “total missing of each other’s mental track,” and Lydgate perceives only the “blank unreflecting surface her mind presented to his” (363). He had groped after a union on the same “track” via a yoke that bound them together, but the continued lack of the close bond he sought instead validates his fears of an utterly unresponsive wife. Like Dorothea’s pity, however, this fear is an inescapably distancing emotion that cannot forge an effective union or yoke. It is therefore incapable of improving his marriage to an entirely separate species.

The recurring species metaphor reveals another aspect of the yoke of marriage in Middlemarch: the shifts in hierarchy that Eliot’s yoke mandates. For Lydgate, “it was inevitable that ... he should think of [Rosamond] as if she were an animal of another and feebler species. Nevertheless she had mastered him” (413). In marrying Rosamond, he had anticipated a “docile” (220) partner, of a “feebler” disposition than his own, who would be the perfect submissive woman. It is only when he discovers “the terrible tenacity of this mild creature” (362) that he finds that he must submit as well. He must lower himself to the level of someone he views as unquestionably his inferior, making his self-controlled yoke so much more difficult because he has such passion and pride. Of similar passionate disposition, Dorothea finds it equally difficult to unquestioningly obey a partner whom she has long ceased to respect or hold superior. She now pities him, placing herself emotionally above him as she looks down on him as a “lamed creature” (266). Had she continued to believe him to be higher than her, the pity-forged yoke would never have been necessary, as she would have willingly obeyed her venerable teacher. Instead, she must lower herself to his level if she chooses to yoke herself to him. This is a curious inversion of the traditional hierarchy of submission, in which the inferior yields to the superior; in these yoked marriages, submission is still an act that demeans one, but it is the superior who is demeaned. Eliot in fact does ultimately use the yoke to achieve equality, for two yoked creatures must be at the same level; that level, however, is the lower one of the two in a relationship.

Thus, because of the unexpected power that their spouses hold, both Lydgate and Dorothea must yoke themselves, using their powerful wills to execute an abasement of themselves, both hoping for a better future accomplished through the sacrifice. Middlemarch seems in part to justify such an attitude, for a restraining yoke has worked for the other character in the novel who refers to marriage as a yoke, Mrs. Garth (153). Her yoke, too, is wholly self-wrought, by her strict belief in proper feminine submission. This principle has led her otherwise forceful and opinionated self to defer to her husband at times of crucial decision-making, in spite of her generally more assertive personality and higher social status. She seems to show the success story of marriage as an equalizing yoke, a happy ending of the path Lydgate and Dorothea attempted, the only one in the novel. Only one pair manages to escape entirely from marriage as a form of bondage in Middlemarch: Ladislaw and Dorothea. No yoke is needed to bind them. Instead, only their mutual passionate and “ardent” spirit unites them, the antithesis of the self-control that built the others’ yokes. In these diverse and complex descriptions of marriage, George Eliot gives her readers no clear instructions on the best way to form a
happy marriage: a yoke can lead to harmony (for the Garths) or fail utterly. Nonetheless, a marriage free of a wooden harness, even if one willingly worn, seems the best of all.
Students in Art of Living, true to the spirit of IHUM, engage in the big questions of life—who am I? what ought I do? for what may I hope?—through an exploration of five disparate and dazzling texts of the Western tradition: they move from the elegant eroticism of Plato’s Symposium to the claustrophobic Danish court of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, from the exuberant fragments of Nietzsche’s Gay Science to the soaring African-American bildungsroman of Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon. In the middle, arguably the most difficult and enigmatic, is Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling. What is required for these first year students is a mental agility to jump to and fro these texts, each offering an irreducibly different worldview, the intellectual capacity to ask and answer probing questions, and the personal strength to examine their own lives through the philosophical paradigms that these authors offer us.

Alex Hertz’s magisterial essay accomplishes all these tasks and more. His is a meditation, an almost existential encounter, with what W. H. Auden calls “the living thoughts” of Kierkegaard. Hertz confronts the fundamental problem of the paradox in the heart of Kierkegaard: If faith is something this cannot be rationalized, how can one then talk about it? Is not one compelled to remain silent? Kierkegaard’s solution in Fear and Trembling is the construction of the Johannes de Silentio. Through the fiction of the ironically named narrator, Kierkegaard is able to bypass the paradox of explaining faith through the persona of someone who claims not to have faith. Hertz’s work thus follows the great Danish thinker along the perilous path that leads us away from the loquacious temptations of skepticism and doubt to the unutterable Kingdom of God’s Truth. Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling, arguably his most personal work, is subtitled a lyrical dialectic. Hertz’s first quarter IHUM essay might perhaps also be subtitled a lyrical dialectic; lyrical in the sense that it is eloquently and beautifully written, dialectic in the sense that it records his hermeneutic engagement as a reader to the unfathomable depths of Kierkegaard’s faith.

—Andrew Hui
A Challenging Invitation to Faith

Alex Hertz

There is a moment, halfway through *Fear and Trembling*, when the reader realizes a terrible paradox – in attempting to understand Kierkegaard’s philosophy of faith, she is in fact distancing herself from Kierkegaard’s message. If faith cannot be rationalized, how can we possibly read an account of it? We are forced, manipulated by Kierkegaard, to struggle through this contradiction, among others. But there is a second moment, a moment of enlightenment where the reader realizes that this difficulty in reading *Fear and Trembling* is representative of the struggle inherent in faith. Kierkegaard invents the narrator Johannes de Silentio, whose message and our approach to the text are beautifully aligned – just as we must “…continue to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) we must read Johannes’ narrative in the same way. These biblical words are Paul’s advice to his fellow Christians, that the reverential fear we have toward God should always be a guiding principle. In essence, his words suggest that true faith comes only with agonizing, passionate difficulty. Through deferred narration, intentional silence, distinct rhetorical approaches, and irresolvable contradictions, Kierkegaard similarly helps the reader toward faith precisely by making it harder to attain.

Kierkegaard’s use of the fictional narrator Johannes de Silentio is integral to portraying the incomprehensibility of, and hence the difficulty of achieving, faith. Kierkegaard invents this philosopher who is an amateur at faith to speak for him, since faith cannot be “taught” by an authority. It is revealed early that Johannes greatly admires Abraham but is “virtually annihilated” by his inability to understand his faith. *Fear and Trembling*, then, is his account of his amazement at faith, not an attempt to understand it. This is a remarkable literary technique of Kierkegaard’s. The text takes on the form of personal astonishment at faith by a philosopher, and thus is useful in inspiring the reader to admire the absurdity of faith in a similar way. The intended effect on the reader is “not to make Abraham more intelligible thereby, but in order that his unintelligibility might be seen… for, as I have said, I cannot understand Abraham, I can only admire him” (136). Through a non-authoritative narrator, Kierkegaard escapes the pitfalls of a rational attempt at explaining faith, which would a priori fail to capture its incomprehensibility. In other words, de Silentio is the anti-Hegel figure, whose rejection of rationality in assessing religion is an inspirational model for those who must do the same to acquire faith.

A rational approach is empowered by words; faith is empowered by silence. *Fear and Trembling*’s greatest strength, as well as its greatest weakness, is its refusal to mediate through explanation. Hence, it employs a narrator who is literally incapable of explanation due to his silence in the face of faith. What better name to ascribe to him than Johannes de Silentio, John of silence? As mentioned before, his role is crucial in “teaching” the reader about faith in the only way possible without risking hypocrisy: encouraging the reader to find amazement in Abraham’s story. But he has another essential function in describing faith itself, which is to convey the role of silence in faith, adding yet another
layer of difficulty for the reader. When Abraham can give no reasons to justify his compliance with God’s request – his only son will perish, along with the future generations he was promised – he resorts to silence. Silence fills the liminal space where reason is suspended and the dialectic breaks down entirely. Abraham’s leap of faith cannot be mediated by language. While silence is a problem for the reader in trying to grasp the meaning of faith, it is this very problematizing that activates a genuine religious response in the reader. In Abraham’s case as well as Johannes’, silence is simultaneously quiet resignation as well as an absurd belief that the message will be conveyed without speech; silence thus does something incredible: it demonstrates the resignation-recovery double movement of faith itself. Johannes de Silentio suggests that, in its silence, this book functions as an absurd attempt at impossible mediation. In the context of Fear and Trembling, silence is an invitation to faith precisely by making the reader fill in the void of language.

Johannes de Silentio has made the movement toward faith but has not yet attained it; through the organization of this dialectical narrative, the reader is guided through Johannes’ movements to experience the fear and trembling in faith for himself. Each section represents a stage in the ascension to faith. The text begins with a short but significant preface by Johannes de Silentio establishing a metaphor comparing spice merchants to Christians, suggesting that faith has become an easily attainable commodity. Thus, we begin the text just as we begin the quest for faith, merchants looking to attain this religious value. But we are scorned early for this systematic approach, and warned that we ought not seek to logically analyze the text in this way, since this Hegelian strategy will backfire for “any systematic bag-searcher; this is not the [Hegelian] System” (43). As we move onto the Attunement, we consider a man who, amazed with Abraham’s story, tries to comprehend faith through four different versions of the story that make Abraham’s actions understandable. No longer do we commodify faith at this stage, but we are still guilty of imposing logic onto the absurd – each story ends in tragedy and loss because Abraham failed to make a leap of faith. This is the attunement of the bell of faith, which we have hit and are appreciating the ominous overtones of doubt. We are trying to identify all the aspects of faith that are produced when we strike it as we would a great bell, and to that end we must take the harmonious tones along with the dissonant ones, the admiration of faith as well as the problems inherent in comprehending the irrational. The Attunement is therefore a powerful fulcrum in our own ascension to faith, since it shows us the danger of mediating the incomprehensible. If we jump into faith trying to understand it as we would a logic puzzle, then we risk perverting the value of Abraham’s faith, which by its very nature can be induced in those who admire it but not by any means understood. As Johannes continues into the next section, he problematizes faith even further by tempting us to think we have understood it. The Speech in Praise of Abraham that follows represents the basis of our faith as sheer amazement at Abraham’s actions, an acceptance of the impossible. This seems acceptable, easy even, and therein lies the problem: if we think we understand faith, then that faith is cheap and essentially worthless. The greatest threat to our faith is making it, like most ideas in the mid-19th century, “so dirt cheap that one begins to wonder whether in the end anyone will want to make a bid” (41). Thus Johannes takes our amazement and problematizes it to convey the fear and trembling inherent in the movement toward faith, thereby making it infinitely valuable. The Preamble from the Heart and three Problemata outline central paradoxes that further complicate things for the reader by showing “how monstrous a
paradox faith is” (82). Through rigorous philosophical argumentation, Johannes explains the absolute duty we have to God, such that murder, as a command of faith, actually suspends the ethical as well as a commitment to one’s family. This message is important, but what is essential in understanding it is the rhetorical form Johannes adopts to convey it—philosophical reason. This is no mistake. Before this stage in the attainment of faith, the reader has given up all hope of understanding, all worldly logic. In the act of reading we have become knights of infinite resignation. Now, through a double movement of resigning logic and simultaneously believing that we can rationally understand, we have become knights of faith. Amazingly, this resurgence of philosophy gives us back everything we have lost, a microcosmic demonstration of the way faith goes one movement beyond resignation and gets the entire world back.

In accordance with the structure of Fear and Trembling, we have experienced the double movement of faith. But we are not done yet—faith is not one movement but many, a constant fluctuation between doubt and absurd certainty. Hence, Johannes offers an epilogue that debriefs us on what we have experienced and warns us for the future. The spice merchant metaphor comes to a close, and it is clear that the purpose of making faith more difficult to achieve is a “strategic dumping” in order to drive up the “price” of faith. This textual symmetry is evident again in his warning that one can go no further than faith. But there is a new image: Zeno trying to go further than Heraclitus in his philosophy and, in the process, concluding what Heraclitus had abandoned. A standard reading would yield that this is a warning not to deceive ourselves and go further than faith. Certainly this is true. But as a rhetorical device it does something more; it forces us to doubt the integrity of our own faith by instilling an anxiety that we may unknowingly have abandoned faith altogether. Here, Johannes is doing more than bullying. He is giving us doubt so that we do not grow comfortable with our understanding of faith, so that we are always repeating the double movement between doubt and absurd certainty, between resignation and faith. Through explicit and implicit guidance, the structure of Fear and Trembling fills us with anguish as well as a passion for faith, thus moving us in its direction.

In reflection, the premise of problematizing faith for the reader through contradictions seems to be a troublesome one. After all, if this essay has confused you, I have not accomplished anything: how is Kierkegaard successful if we are so confused by his text? Indeed, confusion alone is not sufficient to achieve faith, as Johannes himself believes: “I wouldn’t attach any importance in itself to a difficulty which, by overcoming it, brings a shrewd fellow no further than the most ordinary and simple-minded person has already reached without the difficulty” (62). Rather than viewing confusion as an end in itself, Johannes requires us to view it as a way of destroying false roads to faith. If our confusion results from a desire to impose logic on faith, then in order to achieve faith we must break free from reason. Thus, what is important is not that the Abraham story deeply confuses us—it is the way this confusion forces us to approach faith after we have been “virtually annihilated” and all our rational pathways into the text have been demolished.

To this end, Kierkegaard repeatedly employs irresolvable contradictions. I have discussed the contradictions between silence and discourse, the absolute and ethical, and the paradox of understanding the absurd. Fear and Trembling is also rife with implicit contradictions. Johannes transitions between “loving” God and “fearing” God as if they were interchangeable. The very relationship with God is paradoxical, as we must some-
how love Him and tremble at the thought of Him. Christianity itself is a great absurdity where God can be human, where Jesus seems to renounce God before dying, and where a Christian such as de Silentio, wanting to love and understand the Bible, is “all the time aware of that monstrous paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repulsed” (62). It is clear that these absurdities are important, and this book uses them in its content and in its structure in order to make the reader discover why. It is not easy - in all these cases, we are left frustrated, anxious even. The biggest meta-referential contradiction of all is that through these absurdities, the reader finds the meaning of faith. What is this text besides a battle to grasp contradictions without mediating them? It is this emotional, terrifying struggle that characterizes faith, which is the opposite of conviction. Comprehension and philosophy are not the right tools for working with faith, since “faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off” (82). But as we approach the text in a passionate struggle, we have been enlightened as to the status of faith as something even higher than philosophy primarily because instead of appealing to logic it directly induces a deeply profound religious response.

Thus, it is a flagrant misunderstanding to say we are left with nothing concrete after reading *Fear and Trembling*. Johannes de Silentio imparts to us a deep disturbance of our own lack of faith as well as a profound sense that faith is impossible to logically understand – our confusion from the text guides us to approach faith in the appropriate way by stripping us of our dependency on rationality. Thus, it is a profound strength of the text that through Johannes’ rhetorical strategies, we leave feeling “virtually annihilated” by our attempts to understand faith. In the end, we give up trying to comprehend. We are humbled, amazed at Abraham’s faith, but full of doubt as to our own. Have we accomplished anything? Following Johannes de Silentio’s *via negativa* argument, we know what faith is not, but we cannot grasp exactly what it is. Consider the possibility that this awful doubt signifies that we have already attained it. Kierkegaard himself raises this question. “Suppose that [faith] does not want to be understood and that the maximum of any eventual understanding is to understand that it cannot be understood” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 214). There are two profound moments of reflection in reading *Fear and Trembling*. The first is a moment of resignation. The second is a moment of faith. This text repeatedly problematizes faith for the reader so that he is left paralyzed with anguish; what he realizes in the second moment is that his failure to understand is a movement toward faith, that his anguish is in fact St. Paul’s “fear and trembling.”

**Works Cited**


INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

On the first day of class, students in the IHUM course Beyond Survival were asked two questions: “How do you define survival?”; and “How do you live after you survive?” The next ten weeks of the course would consider the complexities of these questions across genres, cultures, and histories. Students were confronted with the emotional and physical trauma of surviving colonization, slavery, war, prison camps, and a dictatorship as represented in plays, a slave narrative, a graphic novel, and a novel. In keeping with the goals of the humanities, the course also sought to increase the students’ capacity for empathy by encouraging them to imaginatively connect to experiences that may seem to trivialize the concerns of most incoming freshmen.

Benjamin Pittenger’s capacity for empathy is evident in his astute close readings of two seemingly disparate texts, August Wilson’s play The Piano Lesson and Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel Maus I: A Survivor’s Tale. Pittenger is able to make connections between the texts’ representations of the aftermath of slavery and the Holocaust, respectively, while attending to their thematic, generic, historical, and cultural differences. He adroitly handles complex concepts by recognizing the possibility for a multiplicity of meanings, even in a single text. The “liminal,” or what was vividly defined in lecture as the “space betwixt and between,” is traveled by Pittenger as he deftly moves between the train imagery in The Piano Lesson to that in Maus I. In the space of a few pages, Pittenger’s reader is taken on an interpretative journey that bears witness to what may constitute survival and what may lay beyond it.

— JANNA SEGAL
Trains, Pains, and Automobiles:  
The Liminal Trek Beyond Survival in  
*The Piano Lesson* and *Maus I*  

**Ben Pittenger**

The predominance of movement is common in both Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* and Spiegelman’s *Maus I*. These works depict transport as a means of attaining personal objectives, but they challenge the degree to which it enables the characters to overcome their burdens and instill meaning in their survival. To complete the journey beyond survival, the Charleses must confront their ancestors’ horrific past and integrate this history into the present. This occurs during the family’s post-survival moment at the end of the play. Different from beyond survival, the post-survival condition is a restless state in which one rewrites the history of a survived trauma. Unlike the Charles family in Wilson’s drama, Vladek in Spiegelman’s graphic novel defines beyond survival as the withdrawal from his harrowing memories and the achievement of closure with the past. Despite these disparate definitions, both texts convey physical transportation as a means to a liminal space between confinement and progress toward survival. Liminality, as defined by the Professors Elam, is “the space betwixt and between” two spaces that carries “the potential for creative and destructive possibility.” Vladek and the Charles family transport themselves imaginatively through time in order to resolve this in-between space and go beyond survival; however, the respective meanings of this journey result in the Charles’ success and Vladek’s failure.

Both texts utilize trains to introduce physical transportation’s liminal effects. In Wilson’s play, Doaker depicts a train’s ability to mislead its passengers: “if the train stays on the track [. . . ] it’s going to get where it’s going. It might not be where you going” (23). By making the train the subject of his sentences, Doaker gives it a high degree of agency. He also ties the train to active verbs, stating that “it’s going to get where it’s going.” The train has a sense of purpose and even free will to control where “it’s going.” In addition, he omits the role of humans in the train’s ability to travel; it simply “stays on the track.” Again, by providing the train with an active verb, Doaker suggests that the passenger’s will is subordinate to the train’s. To further illustrate this dynamic, he stresses that the train “might not be where you going.” “ Might” fosters a sense of ambiguity about where the traveler goes, or rather, is taken. By boarding the train, people freely depart from or even escape their origins but forfeit control over their journeys, stuck between the certainty of their intended destinations and the uncertainty of the train’s. Although physical transport grants travelers the potential to progress toward an endpoint, their realized progress must remain within the confines of the train’s agency. Caught in this interim, the passengers are in a liminal state.

In *Maus*, Vladek is similarly stuck “betwixt and between” his intentions and the train’s on his trip from the prisoner camp to Poland. A rabbi comments on Vladek’s control over his own endpoint: “’Now I see you are a ‘roh-eh hanoled,’ one who sees what
the future will bring” (60). Emphasizing that he “sees” the “future,” the rabbi suggests that Vladek has an acute awareness of his destination and frames Vladek as a figure of superior knowledge. Because this statement comes from a source of Jewish authority, Vladek’s power becomes imbued with even more meaning since it derives from the religion for which he is targeted. The scene portrays Vladek’s perspicacity as a means of advancing toward domestic safety, allowing him to triumph over the Nazis’ persecution. However, the subsequent frame reveals Vladek in shock when the train passes his hometown. The text exposes him pressed against the window. He faces a direction different from the train’s trajectory. When his and the train’s objectives clash, Vladek also morphs from a free agent into a potential captive. By suddenly showing him from outside the train, the text stresses his isolation from the free world. He therefore transforms from a passenger into a prisoner of transportation, and his path to safety is jeopardized. As in *The Piano Lesson*, the train is a medium between progress and imprisonment, and the journey’s outcome is painfully unclear. This in-between state reveals that physical transport is not a reliable avenue to survival.

Both works continue their critiques of physical transportation by suggesting that those who use it become overwhelmed by liminality’s destructive potential. Wining Boy’s nomadic adventures as a piano player expose this concept: “‘Got to carrying that piano around and man did I get slow [. . .]. Now, who am I? Am I me? Or am I the piano player?’” (43-44). His travels represent a risky space between his freedom to forge his fame and his confinement within the piano’s historical power. By stating that the piano “slow[s]” him, Wining Boy implies that constructions of African Americans as piano players drain his mobility. The image of “carrying that piano” portrays the immense burden of this transportation: he moves both this construction and an emblem of his family history, which consume his strength. Wining Boy’s prospects for survival change from being unclear to being definitively grim. His rhetorical questions imply that transporting the piano causes his identity to erode, in addition to his strength. The piano blurs his sense of self, for he is caught betwixt and between his real identity and his socially-prescribed role as “the piano player.” Wining Boy is characterized as a nameless, dehumanized being whose purpose in life is fettered to the piano as “the” piano player. His family history molds him into a unique, irreplaceable being, isolating him from humans and limiting his identity. Evidently, Wining Boy’s reliance on physical transportation confines him within the piano’s stifling grip, and the destructive weight of his past impedes his survival.

Physical mobility also overwhelms Anja and Vladek with confinement during their flight from Srodula. Vladek conveys their hopeless path ahead with a dismal question: “‘We walked in the direction of Sosnowiec— but where to go?!’” (125). The question appears in bold to stress the characters’ urgency and desperation in not finding a destination. They are stuck in between their freedom to leave Srodula and the constraints of the Nazi threat. The frame’s artwork suggests that these constraints are the dominating force in their position, and that Vladek and Anja suffer from liminality’s destructive potential. Because the path they walk is in the shape of the swastika, the art indicates that the Nazis literally dictate their travels and destination. Unlike before, the characters’ endpoint is not ambiguous, but rather hopelessly predetermined. Movement becomes futile. Regardless of their path, the prospect of capture or death confines them. Physical transportation evolves from a liminal uncertainty into a destructive force, failing the
characters in their quest to elude hardship.

Although both works convey physical transport as a flawed method of escape, they diverge in their portrayals of temporal mobility as a means of resolving liminality. In the climax of Wilson’s play, the stage directions reveal Berniece’s confrontation with the past: “It is in this moment, from somewhere old, that Berniece realizes what she must do” (105). Because “this moment” and “somewhere old” appear in succession, the two time periods become concomitant in Berniece’s mind. This implies her imaginative movement into the past, as she extracts guidance from her family history and embeds its meaning in the present. Through temporal transport, she “realizes what she must do.” The assertive connotation of “must” suggests that the past actively engages with Berniece’s mental faculties and inspires her to play the piano. “[R]ealizing” this obligation, she gains a sense of understanding that did not previously exist. Thus, her interaction with the past elevates her mentally to a state of progress, and her liminality achieves a creative potential. After this confrontation, Berniece brings the Charleses beyond survival by singing, “I want you to help me, Mama Berniece” (105). This address to her ancestors is a literal conversation between “somewhere old” and “this moment.” Her request for Mama Berniece’s “help,” or the active intervention of her past, suggests that Berniece embraces the trauma of her family history and grants it entrance into the present. In this post-survival climax, Berniece’s imaginative movement through time resolves the emotional tension of her family’s past and allows the Charleses to move forward and venture beyond survival.

This strategy is ineffective for Vladek as he travels temporally into his memories. He fails to achieve emotional closure with his trauma when he dwells on giving up his deceased son Richieu. The artwork parallels his emotional obstacle. Here, Vladek’s stationary bike represents the futile nature of his attempt to withdraw from the past (81). Among the three images in this scene, the first conveys a strong effort on the bike, which diminishes to complete immobility in the third. These three frames are also devoid of boundaries, so they appear temporally indistinct. He appears simultaneously mobile and motionless, suggesting a tension between progress and stasis. His mental exploration of the past traps him in a state just as liminal as physical transport. Meanwhile, the continuity of his motion mirrors his ceaseless attempt to overcome his past. Regardless of how hard he pedals, he is inevitably confined in a static position. Given that the bike has no means to reach any destination, Vladek seems to be constantly revisiting and surviving the Holocaust in his mind. There is literally no end to his survival and therefore no space beyond it. He succeeds in actively confronting the past, yet he cannot resurface from the memories in which he is emotionally submerged. Unable to gain closure, Vladek is perpetually in the process of surviving, and he fails to go beyond survival.

Both The Piano Lesson and Maus I reveal characters that employ temporal mobility to resolve the liminality instilled in them by the past. Although Vladek and the Charles family both incorporate their traumatic pasts into their emotional presents, this only carries the latter beyond survival. Perhaps Vladek’s alternative definition of this state derives from his limited use of physical entities to document his trauma. Because of the carvings on the piano and the supposed spirits within, this object represents and stores the Charles’ family history. In contrast, after destroying Anja’s diaries, Vladek primarily relies on his mind to preserve his history. The horrors of the past are concentrated inside him, and his memories become infectious. Unless Vladek removes himself from the past’s emotional toll, he will remain confined within his experiences and will not move.
beyond survival. These two texts suggest that survival is not contingent on the severity of the burden, but rather on the unique circumstances of the survivors themselves.

Works Cited
Kelly Vicars

INSTRUCTOR'S FOREWORD

Freshmen are often scandalized and confounded by Dante’s vision of the afterlife. What gives the fourteenth-century Tuscan poet the chutzpah—to use a rigorous critical theory term—to put his enemies to hell, and who is he to say who populates the rarified upper reaches of paradise? To put the question baldly: is Dante just making all of this up?

Kelly Vicars with grace and clarity confronts the question of the truth claims of Dante’s poetry by tackling the most curious case of Geryon the mythical beast with the head of a man, body of a serpent, and the tail of the scorpion that appears in Canto 16 of The Divine Comedy. But by interweaving Arachne’s tapestry on the monstrous hide of the beast, Dante signals the dangers of artistic mimesis and hubris, for, after all, in Ovid’s Metamorphoses Arachne was the proud mortal that competed with the goddess Minerva—and showed the crimes of the gods. As Kelly writes, “The word “textile” has the same etymological root as the word “text;” thus from the outset of Geryon’s introduction the concepts of weaving and writing are drawn into focus.” Because Geryon is a figure of fraud, she argues that Dante here is being fully self-conscious at the audacity of his divine poem and commenting on the capacity of his own art to tell the truth as well as deceive. Her brilliant observation is that at the very middle of his first canticle (canto 16 out of 34 canti), Dante places a disclaimer about the nature of his own art and the dangers of literally interpreting it.

The fiction of the Commedia is that it is not a fiction, so argued Charles S. Singleton, the preeminent Dante scholar of the last century. Through her eloquent, erudite and exemplary essay, Kelly Vicars has not only mastered one of the main themes of the Winter IHUM “Epic Journeys” course by examining Dante’s appropriation of the Latin literary tradition, but contributes in her own right to the American scholarly tradition of querying the veracity of the medieval Italian poet.

—Andrew Hui
Intertwining Art

Kelly Vicars

What truth lurks beneath a work of art’s exterior? In the *Inferno*, Dante the pilgrim is confronted with this question on his voyage through Hell when he comes face to face with the beast Geryon, a monster of so bizarre a physiognomy that he appears false. Yet a multiplicity of meaning is contained within the colorful wheels that adorn his hide: in the monster’s strangely painted exterior is woven Arachne’s tapestry. In intertwining Ovid’s poetry and Arachne’s art, Dante comments on the danger of artistic mimesis and departs from Arachne’s hubristic undertaking in establishing his own humility as both an artist and a subject before God. Geryon’s fraudulent form ultimately illustrates the need to look beneath the deceptively embellished surface of Dante’s *Commedia* in order to grasp the spiritual and symbolic truth within.

The pilgrim and Virgil encounter Geryon as they are about to descend into the circles of fraud. The monster has an unusual anatomy comprised of the human, serpent, and scorpion. Most striking, however, is the description of Geryon’s hide, which is likened to a fabulous tapestry: he “had back and breast and both sides painted with knots and little wheels: with more colors, in weave and embroidery, did never Tartars nor Turks make cloths, nor did Arachne string the loom, for such tapestries” (*Inf.* 17.13-18). The Tartars and the Turks were considered the most skilled weavers of the Middle Ages (Note to *Inf.* 17.16-17, trans. Mark Musa), and in comparing Geryon’s pattern to their tapestries, Dante establishes a curious connection between Geryon and the art of textile weaving. The word “textile” has the same etymological root as the word “text;” thus from the outset of Geryon’s introduction the concepts of weaving and writing are drawn into focus.

In comparing the designs on Geryon’s flanks to those woven by Arachne, Dante engages in a dialogue with her mythological legacy. The description of the designs on the monster’s back is an example of *ekphrasis*, defined by The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as “a verbal description of, or meditation upon, a non-verbal work of art, real or imagined.” Indeed, this comparison evokes Arachne’s woven design, which itself is an example of *ekphrasis* when it is described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid’s story, Arachne fashions a beautifully woven yet bitingly harsh portrayal of the gods, a tapestry so perfect that “neither Minerva, no, nor Envy could find a flaw” (*Met.* 6.129-130). Angered by the young girl’s audacity, Minerva destroys the tapestry and transforms Arachne into a spider: Arachne’s downfall, quite literally, is the threads she too-audaciously spun. Her fatal flaw was her pride in her art, for in boasting of her ability to weave she denies that her talent is a product of divine grace: “You would know, most surely, that Minerva taught her, yet she would not admit it, seemed offended at the suggestion of so great a teacher: ‘I challenge her, and if I lose, there’s nothing I would refuse to pay!’” (*Met.* 23-27). Arachne’s pride leads her to attempt to portray the gods in what she believes to be a perfect mimesis of their deceitful actions with mortals, and she is punished severely for doing so. Arachne’s downfall sheds light on the danger of pride in both a personal,
artistic, and Christian sense, and her hubristic blunder serves as a warning for precisely what Dante must guard himself, and his own art, against.

Arachne’s tapestry serves as a precedent for Dante’s poetic art, and he connects to her as his mythological counterpart. In looking to Arachne as his artistic double, thus embedding an ekphrasis within his own ekphrasis, Dante acknowledges the beauty of her work: Arachne’s brilliant artistic craftsmanship is the standard he must strive for in his *Commedia*. Yet Dante also recognizes that he must not exhibit Arachne’s pride, and when he addresses her in *Purgatorio*, his opinion of her hubristic downfall becomes clear. In this scene, the pilgrim and Virgil walk through the Terrace of Pride. There they see scenes carved into the stone path below them (another instance of ekphrasis), one of which depicts Arachne turned to a spider on her web. The carvings are likened to “grave-stones set above the buried dead… their carven images recalling them to mind” (*Purg.* 12.16-18). These are testaments to individuals whose pride led them to overreach their limits, be they artistic or otherwise. Arachne has thus been literally “turned to stone” as an example of excess pride. In seeing the carving, the pilgrim responds, “Ah, mad Arachne, I saw you all but turned to spider, wretched on the strands you spun, which did you so much harm” (*Purg.* 12.43-45). The pilgrim’s response to the image represents Dante’s commentary on her tragic downfall. In speaking to Arachne through the pilgrim, Dante denounces her hubris, but also addresses himself as an artist similar to her: Dante realizes that in writing the *Inferno*, he risks being condemned for his art. Like the strands of Arachne’s tapestry, the words of his poem are in danger of being construed as literal truth. If Dante is so confident as to challenge God through poetic mimesis, he will most certainly be condemned for his pride to the very Hell he strives to describe. It is imperative, then, for Dante to clearly establish his artistic humility, and in order to illustrate the true meaning of his art, he paints a picture of the most deceptive creature possible: Geryon.

Geryon’s purpose as a figurative messenger for Dante the poet is made apparent by the monster’s placement in Hell. Geryon is literally a means of transportation for the pilgrim and Virgil into the circles of fraud, and is also the only means of passage between the corporeal sins of lust, gluttony, and wrath above, and those of a more intellectual nature below. The pilgrim cannot cross save atop Geryon’s back, and the monster must therefore be considered before the pilgrim, and *readers*, can pass. It is at this crucial transition point in the pilgrim’s journey that Dante chooses to insert a disclaimer, so to speak, concerning his mission in writing his poem. Geryon’s placement in what is essentially the midpoint of the pilgrim’s journey also evokes the opening of the poem in which the pilgrim sets out in the middle of his journey of life; Dante uses Geryon at the midpoint of his poem to relay a message defining the nature of the work of art that was central to his own life, his *Commedia*.

Geryon thus becomes a crucial marker for literary travelers as they make their own descent into the *Inferno*’s depths. He is the image of fraud itself: half man, half beast, a monster that “makes the whole world stink” (*Inf.* 17.3). His physical anatomy is deceiving, for his “face was that of a just man, so kindly seemed its outer skin, and the rest of its torso was that of a serpent” (*Inf.* 17.10-12). Geryon’s snakelike body recalls the serpent in the Garden of Eden, the original deceiver, and his bizarre physiognomy calls into question the nature of fraud itself. Fraud is a falsehood that seems true, and can thus be perceived as the truth. Though Geryon’s body seems unbelievable, the beast’s color-
ful markings evoke the structure of the *Inferno* itself: the colorful circles upon his back correspond with the cyclical pattern of the levels of Hell and the nature of *contrapasso* in which the sinners are punished. Geryon is a symbolic representation of Dante’s art in that his appearance is highly deceptive. His truth, however, exists not in his appearance, but beneath his wondrous yet deceptive exterior: true art, according to Dante, illuminates reality through the symbolic and allegorical levels of meaning that can be grasped only when one looks beyond its surface.

Geryon’s physiognomy stands for the *Inferno* as a whole—a truth so extraordinary it appears false. Dante acknowledges this paradox in Canto 16, interestingly at the very place where Geryon is introduced: “Always to that truth which has the face of falsehood one should close one’s lips as long as one can, for without any guilt it brings shame; but here I cannot conceal it, and by the notes of this comedy, reader, I swear to you, so may they not fail to find long favor, that I saw, through the dark air, a figure come swimming upward, fearful to the most confident heart…” (*Inf.* 16.124-128). This is Dante’s third apostrophe to the reader in the *Inferno*, and is highly significant for several reasons. This is the first time Dante names the title of his poem in the text. In directly addressing the reader about his *Commedia*, he implies that his poem is “that truth which has the face of falsehood.” From the surface, Dante’s Hell appears unbelievably bizarre. However, when read as an allegory the poem is replete with symbolic representations of punishments that accurately represent the sinners’ living actions and are, in their metaphorical sense, true. Dante swears by the notes, or words, of his *Commedia*, earnestly endorsing their veracity beneath his poem’s fantastical exterior.

This marks the crucial departure between his poem and Arachne’s art, for although both are brilliant works of art, the two artists’ opinions of their crafts are far from alike. Whereas Arachne proudly asserts that her images of the Gods are a flawless mimesis of reality, Dante insists that his *Commedia* is an artistic and allegorical depiction of human sin. He thus saves his own soul from punishment for his pride, ironically following the advice that Minerva at first offered Arachne, to “confine your reputation as a weaver to human beings… defer to a goddess, be humble in her presence, ask her pardon… for your arrogance. She will be gracious, if only you ask it” (*Met.* 6.34-38). In projecting his artistic purpose through the use of Geryon, Dante does just that, offering his sincerity as both an artist and a subject of God. Dante extends his humble assertion to readers as well: those who experience Hell through the pilgrim’s eyes must follow Dante’s example of humility and discover the threads of symbolic meaning within the words of his poem.

Dante weaves into his *Commedia* threads of commentary on Arachne’s art and his own. The intersection of these two artists’ crafts proves that art itself is a double-edged sword, for it has the power both to convey truth and to deceive. The key to understanding art is discerning the sometimes hidden meaning of its elements: “Gaze on the teaching that is hidden beneath the veil of the strange verses,” Dante says (*Inf.* 9.61-63). Literal words, like the wheels that adorn Geryon’s back, cannot be taken at face value. The true meaning of art exists beneath the surface, and as Dante realized, failing to recognize this fact presents the risk of eternal condemnation, or perhaps worst of all, the blindness exhibited by Arachne, who failed to grasp the symbolic beauty that deepens the color and meaning of art.
INSTRUCTOR’S FOREWORD

In Inventing Classics, students have the unique opportunity to pursue an understanding of literary and philosophical texts from the ancient world in relation to one another. All too often at universities and colleges, the split in the humanities between philosophy and literature is manifested in curricular design at the undergraduate level. At Stanford, by contrast, students are expected to apprehend the various modalities of “philosophical” writing in context from their first steps into professional writing. Often, students have trouble finding ways to negotiate the differences between various disciplines; seldom does a student come along who not only intuitively comprehends the different modes of discourse employed by philosophy and literature, but who also is able to reflect critically upon each discipline’s grounds for dispute.

Evan Storms is such a student. His “Antigone and the Social Contract Theory of the Crito” takes a novel position regarding the larger philosophical problem of whether or not, and according to what rationale, people should disobey the law. Traditionally, scholars have read Plato’s Crito as a redress of the earlier Socratic claim, found in the Apology and in Sophocles’ Antigone, that one’s responsibility to divine ordinance requires her to disobey the laws. Evan provides a totally new approach of this problem by turning it on its head: what happens if we pose the ethical questions raised by Antigone to Socrates’ claims in the Crito? Evan’s answer is simply brilliant: a bifurcation in the ethical position adopted by Socrates in the Crito results, and thus the argument is shown to be invalid. This paper clearly and adeptly captures the inconsistency that marks not only Plato’s treatment of the problem of adherence to the law between the Apology and the later Crito, but also within the arguments of the Crito itself. As a consequence of Evan’s reading, we can now see that the Crito turns on itself and should not be considered to present a valid argument for adherence to the law regardless of the law’s legitimacy.

Evan follows trends in “New Platonism” that take seriously the invalidity or unsoundness of Socratic arguments in Plato’s dialogues as indicative of Plato’s attempt to distinguish his own philosophical doctrines from those of his mentor Socrates. Central to this approach is the attention to “literary” aspects of Plato’s philosophical argumentation and the willingness to accept many of Plato’s arguments as provisional and non-dogmatic. That Evan’s paper exposes the invalidity of Socrates’ argument is in no way damning for the value of the Crito for scholars and students; rather, Evan’s paper suggests avenues for pursuance of a complex understanding of Plato’s philosophy that strongly emphasizes attention to cultural and intellectual framework just as much as philosophical argument. How fitting it is that Evan chooses to put the Crito to the test of the Antigone.

—Phillip Horky
Antigone and The Socratic Social Contract Theory of the Crito

Evan Storms

The problem of interpretation is that it necessarily imposes something of the interpreter onto the interpreted, and thus we face a doubly problematic challenge in the case of Crito question this paper sets out to answer: how would the Socrates of Plato’s the Crito judge Antigone’s defiance of the law in Sophocles’ play? To approach that question, we will have to interpret not only the theory Socrates propounds in the Crito, but also the nature of Antigone’s rebellion and how the Socratic theory applies to it. If these interpretations are to be valid, it is important to establish from the onset what we will and will not be concerned with. Questions stemming from cultural differences between Socrates’ Athens and Antigone’s Thebes are left to be dealt with elsewhere; we will not attempt to judge whether Socrates would accept the Theban monarchy as a legitimate state, or whether he would agree with Antigone’s religious understanding that it is sacrilegious to leave a dead body unburied. For the purposes of this paper we assume that Socrates concedes both points. These assumptions, I think, are necessary if we are to undertake a serious philosophical analysis of the Socratic social contract theory, using the example of Antigone as a case against which to test it. And it is through such an analysis that I will argue that the Socrates of the Crito would condone both Antigone’s defiance of the law and her willing submission to the consequent punishment. I will, in turn, locate that argument as the basis of the corollary, and, I think, more interesting, conclusion that using Antigone as a test case for the Socratic social contract theory of the Crito sets the internal tensions of that theory in open conflict and thereby exposes its latent contradictions.

The thesis Socrates sets forth in Plato’s Crito involves, first and foremost, a theory of ethics. In discussing with Crito whether he should escape the Athenian jail before being put to death, Socrates works out this theory through deduction; and we find the starting point of that deduction where Socrates and Crito agree that “what we ought to worry about is not so much what people in general will say about us but what the expert in injustice and injustice says…”1 This submission to justice is irrespective of the power “people in general” wield—indeed, of all non-moral personal concerns:

If it becomes clear that such conduct is unjust, I cannot help thinking that the question whether we are sure to die, or to suffer any other ill-effect for that matter... ought not to weigh with us at all in comparison with the risk of acting unjustly.2

As Socrates sees it, justice is an absolute—for only then could it be dictated by a “single authority”3—which demands universal compliance; it is the good as an abstract moral dictate.

The moral imperative to act justly then generates for Socrates a paradigm for the

1The Crito, 48a.
2Ibid, 48d.
3Ibid, 48a.
proper relation between moral agents. In the dialogue, this relation is reached as the conclusion of a syllogism. First, Socrates defends the premise that justice involves not wronging other moral agents. If, as Socrates proposes, “there is no difference between injuring people and doing them an injustice,” and “one must not even return injustice when one is wronged,” then it follows that “one ought not to return an injustice or an injury to any person, whatever the provocation.” Second, Socrates establishes the premise that violating a just agreement constitutes an injury and an injustice. Since there is a moral imperative to fulfill one’s just agreements, it is unjust to break them; and therefore, one who breaks his just agreements commits an injustice and an injury to those with whom he had made those agreements. From these two premises, Socrates concludes that under no circumstances—including suffering an injustice oneself—should one violate his just agreements.

We then reach perhaps the most complex philosophical movement of the Crito, through which Socrates expands his ethical system into a full-fledged social contract theory. This movement consists, essentially, of treating the state as a moral agent; and though Socrates does not explicitly argue for this understanding of the state, he does so implicitly in two senses. First, he personifies the state, in this case Athens, as a single actor capable of speaking with a voice unto itself: “Suppose that...the Laws and communal interests of Athens were to come and confront us with this question: ‘Now, Socrates, what are you proposing to do?’” Second, he argues that the state as an agent forms a just agreement with its citizens; thus the Laws question Socrates on the grounds of “the agreement between you and us.” Specifically, this agreement is a form of social contract between citizen and state. The state brings the citizen into the world by allowing his parents to meet, rears and educates him through its laws, and gives him “a share of all the good things at [its] disposal.” The citizen, in return, is bound to “abide by whatever judgments the State pronounced .... or else persuade it that justice is on [his] side.” Socrates, therefore, sees citizenship itself as a form of just agreement between moral agents.

Yet that agreement is not formed between equals, nor is it unimportant that one of the agents of that agreement is a reified construct. For Socrates, the state is superior to the individual with whom it forms a social contract since it is responsible for his birth and upbringing. Just as the individual does not have “equality of rights with [his] father, or master if [he has] one, to enable [him] to retaliate,” so he has no right to retaliate against the state. Along similar lines, to disobey the laws is to destroy the state, in that the state is a construction of laws and exists only insofar as those laws have the power to govern the actions of individuals: a state cannot “continue to exist...if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force but are nullified and destroyed by private persons.”

It would seem that Antigone, like Socrates, is deeply concerned with the issue of justice. But where Socrates’ understanding of justice leads him to the conclusion that he is bound to face punishment by his state, Antigone invokes justice as the reason she must defy her own. She disobeys Creon’s proclamation that her brother, as a traitor to

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4 A moral agent is any person or group which is capable of acting and of being acted towards either justly or unjustly.
5 Ibid, 49c.
6 Ibid, 49c.
7 Ibid, 49c.
8 Ibid, 49c.
9 Ibid, 50b.
10 Ibid, 50c.
11 Ibid, 51d.
12 Ibid, 50d – 51c.
13 Ibid, 50c.
14 Ibid, 50b.
the state, is not to be buried, because:

...it was not Zeus that made the proclamation; nor did Justice, which
lives with those below, enact such laws as that, for mankind.\textsuperscript{15}

Antigone thus locates justice among the gods, so that just action consists of
acting as the gods dictate. As she sees it, Creon has committed an injustice in denying
her brother burial; and she, in burying him, is correcting that injustice.

Having established the basis of Antigone’s reasoning, we are now in a position to
judge her act in terms of the Socratic social contract theory of the \textit{Crito}.

First, it is important to note that there is no disagreement between Socrates and Antigone over the divine nature of justice. Though he does not invoke the gods as explicitly as Antigone, Socrates’ conception of justice is far from secular. He identifies violence against the state as similar to violence against a parent, insofar as each is “an unholy act.”\textsuperscript{16}
Likewise, he argues that if he acts unjustly he will be punished after death by “the Laws of Hades,”\textsuperscript{17} thereby implying that justice is a form of, or is at least exhibited by, divine law. Antigone and Socrates agree, then, that there is only one justice for mortals and immortals alike. The implication of this agreement is that, if as we assume Socrates subscribes to Antigone’s understanding of the religious importance of burial, Socrates would have to endorse Antigone’s rebellion in the sense that it is a correction of injustice. If the state, by denying her brother burial, has failed to observe divine law and so done him an injustice, Antigone is, in defying the state, correcting that injustice and therefore acting justly.

But this conclusion seems at odds with the more specific social contract theory Socrates espouses. By that theory, it is unjust for Antigone to defy the state, which we have assumed that Socrates would consider legitimate,\textsuperscript{18} because she has, in being raised according to and remaining within Thebes, formed a just agreement to abide its laws. Yet she appears to violate that agreement openly—“I will be a criminal”\textsuperscript{19}—and without attempting to persuade the state, that is Creon, to revoke the proclamation. If Antigone’s situation is exactly parallel to that of Socrates, if her action is defiance of the state in the same sense that his escape would be, then Antigone must be judged to be committing an injustice by the Socratic social contract theory.

How, then, are we to reconcile these contradictory judgments of Antigone by the Socratic theories of the \textit{Crito}? To do so, I think we must appeal to tensions already present in the dialogue itself, arising from the fact that Socrates rejects escaping his punishment as unjust but never renounces the actions which have brought that punishment upon him. Just the opposite, in fact. Socrates, it seems, considers his refusal to escape a continuation of his former philosophical pursuits: “I cannot abandon the arguments which I used to expound in the past simply because this accident has happened to me.”\textsuperscript{20}
Thus there is inherent tension in the \textit{Crito} between Socrates’ submission to his punishment and his refusal to renounce the philosophy which led him to it. And this tension reveals an important nuance of Socrates’ social contract theory: while it excludes open retaliation against the state when this retaliation constitutes a destructive defiance of the laws, it leaves ambiguous the moral status of just action contrary to the laws but with standing recognition of the state’s authority.

\textsuperscript{15} Antigone, 450 – 455.
\textsuperscript{16} Crito, 51c.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 54c.
\textsuperscript{18} There is, of course, an interesting question as to whether Socrates would recognize the Theban monarchy as legitimate in the same sense as the Athenian democracy, but that question is not our concern here.
\textsuperscript{19} Antigone, 75.
\textsuperscript{20} Crito, 46b.
This explains why Socrates will not escape despite considering his punishment unjust. His philosophizing did not constitute an injustice, because it did not involve complete defiance of the laws and so was not a destructive injury to the state. Escape, in contrast, would constitute such an injustice, because it would be a denial of his agreement to submit to the state, and thus an attempt to destroy the state’s foundation, and thus a form of retaliation against that which is beyond retaliation. For Socrates to escape would be to deny absolutely the social contract between himself and the Athenian democracy.

We thus see that our condition for judging Antigone’s action unjust by the Socratic social contract theory does not hold. Antigone’s rebellion is not defiance of the state in the same sense that Socrates’ escape would be, in two important respects. First, Antigone acts to correct an initial injustice by the state rather than to retaliate against it. Her aim, in burying her brother, is not to thwart state authority; she is not striking out against the state, but rather her opposition to it is incidental and arises only because the state is itself opposed to justice. Accordingly, given that justice as the first principle of ethics underlies the Socratic social contract theory, Antigone defies the state for the sake of something more fundamental than the contract by which she has agreed to obey it. Socrates, meanwhile, could not invoke justice in the same manner, for him escaping would not allay the initial injustice of his condemnation and the standing call for his death—if it could, he would have been bound to escape to rectify the state’s injustice—where, for Antigone, the question of injustice begins and ends with the fact of her brother’s burial. Second, Antigone can both defy the state and affirm its legislative right by burying her brother and then accepting her consequent punishment, as she indeed does: “Do you want anything beyond my taking and execution?...Why do you wait, then?” In so doing, Antigone limits the extent of her defiance so that it is not a destructive injury against the state.

There is the possible objection that Antigone somehow rebels against her punishment by committing suicide, but I think this objection is answered decisively by appeal to what the text specifically does and does not say. We see that Creon never issues a prescriptive proclamation that Antigone must die by starvation in the cave; his expectation that she will die thus, stated only to the chorus, is therefore not a law of the state. In fact, Creon leaves the decision of what is to pass once she is locked in the cave to Antigone herself: “There leave her alone, solitary, to die if she so wishes...” If anything, then, Antigone’s suicide should be seen as an expedition of the will of Creon, as the head of the state, that she lose her life. And Antigone’s initial defiance, in this sense, is incomplete: if we see Creon’s proclamation, not as strictly forbidding the burial, but as establishing that anyone who undertakes it will be killed, Antigone has both acted justly and submitted to the laws.

This brings us to the conclusion that the Socrates of the Crito would condone both Antigone’s act of defiance and her being put to death. If this seems paradoxical, it is only because the Socratic theory of the Crito is in tension with itself. The social contract theory Socrates defends prohibits the destructive defiance of the state, but does not completely surrender the determination of justice to it; we see this in that Socrates continues to

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21 Antigone, 496 – 499.
23 That Creon later changes his mind and attempts to have her freed from the cave in no sense changes the fact that Antigone acted according to the law insofar as she was aware of it.
philosophize even though the state treats his philosophizing as a crime to be punished. And Socrates can demand no more of Antigone than he demands of himself. He must allow for, indeed approve of, her initial defiance to the extent that it furthers justice. If "one must never willingly commit injustice," and by our assumption it is an injustice that the state has committed, then Antigone, to rectify that injustice, must bury her brother and, like Socrates, pay no heed to the threat of death. At the same time, if she is to avoid violating entirely her just agreement with the state, she must go willingly to her death as the law dictates. This is essentially a form of compromise with the Socratic social contract: it allows her to defy the state in the name of justice while not thereby dealing it a destructive injury that would constitute an injustice against it.

In judging Antigone by the theory Socrates propounds in the Crito, we have, therefore, in turn come to judge that theory by its capacity to form a coherent verdict on Antigone’s actions. And that verdict—that Antigone acted justly and justly accepted being put to death for it—demonstrates that the Socratic theory, by locating justice in both personal ethical action and in submission to the laws of the state, leaves open the possibility of a clash of equally valid moral claims which can only be reconciled by recourse to the punitive power of the state. In the test case of Antigone, we thus see the internal tensions of the Socratic social contract theory not only set against one another, but so forcibly opposed as to explode the theory itself into the absurdity of granting an action and submission to punishment for it equal claims to justice. It is only because Antigone was put to death that Socrates can declare her to have acted justly. But if justice is allowed no defense against the right of the state to exact punishment for it, and must instead grant that submission to this punishment is itself just, the Socratic social contract theory leaves the consequences of just actions in the hands of a state whose laws are not themselves necessarily just. In cases like that of Antigone, this in effect chains the feet of the moral agent to his own throat—so that he cannot step toward justice without strangling himself. Antigone, then, might well respond to Socrates’ claim that he joins her as a defender of justice as she responds to Ismene’s offer to join her in death: "I will have none of your partnership."

References
