Clamantis is a bi-annual publication for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. We showcase the strongest creative and critical work submitted by current MALS students as well as MALS alumni. We believe that by selecting and integrating work from all four of the program’s concentrations, we will promote intellectual engagement, fruitful questioning, and honest discourse within the realm of liberal studies. If you have questions, comments, or are interested in writing a feature, please e-mail The.MALS.Journal@dartmouth.edu.
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Dear Reader,

BY THE TIME you read this, 2016 will be dead and gone, and boy what a turbulent year it was. I don’t know about you, but I’ve had a hard time building hope within myself lately.

But reading these contemplative works from my MALS colleagues does give me hope. These talented authors see—they are conscious of the challenges in the world, of personal challenges they face, and they want to do something about them. I’m honored to share their voices with the world.

Within these pages you will find a beautiful medley of diverse voices—strong and curious—that closely examine everything from gender identity and a personal relationship with a sibling, to the Black Lives Matter movement and the Afghan diaspora. In reading these works, I hope you consider your own truth and to agree to never become complacent—to always search, question, and proclaim.

I’d like to thank my managing editors and assistant editors for all their hard work on this issue. We had an overwhelming amount of excellent submissions and we had many difficult conversations before making our final selections. Hats off to our cover design artist, student Ken Davis, who is not only artistically talented, but someone whom I admire and respect greatly. Thank you for another fabulous cover.

Thank you, as always, to Clamantis adviser and personal mentor Anna Minardi. You are a beautiful soul and your advice and support always come as a great comfort to me.
And of course thank you to professor and MALC chair Don Pease as well as Wole Ojurongbe for their continued support of this student-run publication.

Here’s to 2017!

Love and light,

*Justine M. Kohr*
PART I: CREATIVE WRITING
HOLY MOUNTAIN

Dan Hampton

BRANA ADAMSKI WAS a happy child.

Humming and smiling, the little girl bobbed through the crowds of Ben Yehuda Street, her bright yellow skirt flapping against brown legs, and a white blouse untucked at the back. She was at that age where her limbs seemed to have outgrown her body, and she had a gangly, coltish look. With her thick hair pulled back Brana’s ears stuck out sideways, but she didn’t care much. The ponytail was tied with a blue band that nearly matched her blue tennis shoes, and she was very proud to show these off. A gift from a New York cousin, in the world of ten-year-old girls they were a definite status symbol. As always, a single long strand of black hair had come loose, and it bounced in all directions as she skipped down the chaotic street towards the bus stop.

She was used to the noise.

Anywhere in West Jerusalem was loud and busy, particularly the Jewish Quarter of Nahalat Shiva. There were no sidewalks along this section of the street, just a long row of skinny trees growing straight up from planters. They looked like soup bowls, she thought. Heavy, concrete soup bowls. Up ahead a knot of people blocked her way; young men wearing cargo shorts with T-shirts, their kippahs splashing a bit of color atop each head. Men in suits with open shirts clutched newspapers, gesturing and speaking loudly with their faces close together. Other men were there as well; men huddled in small clusters or walking arm-in-arm. Men dressed in black with twin braids protruding beneath their hats, swinging as they walked and framing each bearded face. Women scurried busily between shops, clutching bulging plastic bags and yelling into cell phones. Ambling tourists wandered aimlessly, stopping to point and snap pictures while the flow of people split around them like water past a rock.

It was easy to see Jerusalem in pastels, but there were brighter patches too. An orange awning curving along a storefront; cheerful red umbrellas sprouting before a café, and hanging pots filled with purple and white flow-
ers. Constantly glancing in all directions, like most children Brana saw all of it without seeing it at all. Making it across the street in ten skips, she hopped over four streetcar rails embedded in the pavement then carefully avoided the cobblestone border.

It was bad luck to step there.

Deciding on a short cut to avoid most of the crowd she veered onto a side street, then into a small, shaded souk. Open air markets like this were marvelous and something else she’d never known before coming to Israel. Fruit vendors held out apples and oranges. The sharp scent of lemons mixed with the heavy sweetness rising from soft mounds of dates. Weaving through bushels of nuts, Brana was careful not to knock them as they were already overflowing. At the end of the souk, her nostrils filled with the aroma of honey and leather mixed with automobile exhaust. Ducking through the exit’s sunlit arch she found herself back in the street, blinking against the glare. Waves of hot air rose from the sunny boulevard’s pavement and there were cars everywhere. Horns honked incessantly and people chattered as the girl zigged past them towards the bus stop.

Thoroughly enjoying the hot sunshine, she could well remember the bitter cold of her old home in Russia, near Minsk. Brana loved Israel; the hot, dusty summer weather, and the rocky, dry hills around Jerusalem. Nothing would ever get her back to Russia. Nothing. Smiling wider, the girl raised her arms to soak up the comforting rays, liking the heat on her shoulders as she turned the last corner and promptly collided something solid.

“Whoa!” It was like running into a talking wall. Brana bounced backwards, her arms windmilling as she dropped the bag. Two hard hands suddenly gripped her shoulders, freezing the girl in place and for a long moment she hung motionless. A deep male laugh boomed out and she dangled like a doll as he put her gently down against the nearest building.

“Quite a runner you are, little one.” The voice was gravelly, but not unpleasant. “It’s a good thing I don’t bruise easily.”

Brana timidly looked up. The man was dressed in dark green clothes and powerfully built. His sleeves were rolled up past the elbow and a thick pelt of curly, dark hair curled over his forearms. Tilting her head back, the girl found herself staring into a pair of liquid brown eyes. His lips weren’t smiling,
but his eyes were. She noticed some type of black gun slung across his broad
chest as he let her go and stepped back. A soldier. She did not notice his slender
companion several feet away very slowly move the barrel of his own weapon
away from her.

“I’m … I’m so sorry. I … didn’t …”

This time the soldier did smile. Children, as he well knew from his
time in Gaza, were a very real threat. Maybe more of a threat because no one
wanted to see them that way. He’d lost two friends who underestimated kids.
Kids with bombs. But not this one.

“It’s alright little one.” His partner picked up the bag, glanced inside,
then handed it to Brana. “On your way. Do well in school.”

“I will!” She forgot her fear and looked from one man to the other,
eyes wide. Wait till she told her friends! She’d met a real soldier. Well, not
met so much as run into one, but still. Spinning on her heels, she flipped the
bag over a shoulder and walked more sedately down the sidewalk. Stealing a
quick glimpse back Brana saw both men watching her. The skinny one wasn’t
smiling but the stocky soldier grinned, white teeth bright against his unshaven
cheeks. Happy again, she strolled jauntily to the stop and mingled with a
throng of chattering children waiting for the bus. Immediately joining her
friend Sarah they began discussing their favorite subject -- boys.

“But he’s so old,” Sarah was giggling. “He’s almost sixteen!” Sarah
was also an émigré from Russia.

“He’s still gorgeous,” Brana breathed dreamily as they openly admired
the circle of silly, strutting teenage boys. Both girls then turned back to their
other principle preoccupation -- what to be when they grew up. After discuss-
ing this at length, they decided to become either doctors or fashion models --
whichever came first. Brana sighed at the junior wolves again, relieved that she
didn’t live in nearby Mea Shearim. Orthodox Jews with their ultra-strict codes
of behavior never allowed girls to talk with boys, to see movies, or listen to
music. Nothing fun. And they were always covered up, even in the heat. Why
live like that, she wondered, and miss every good thing?

Even at ten years of age Brana knew the answer. Her parents had
spoken of it enough, and the girl involuntarily looked east. Jerusalem slowly
sloped upwards in that direction, and though she couldn’t see it Brana knew it
was there. The mountain with the golden dome. God lived there, her parents said, and so did the rabbi. But if that was true why was everyone near it so unhappy? And if God was so great why did He live on a mountain? She didn’t quite understand and really didn’t care, so when squealing brakes announced the bus’s arrival she promptly forgot the whole thing. Trooping aboard, the girls settled into a front seat with their heads together, whispering excitedly.

Twenty meters up the street a young man leaned against an alleyway entrance trying to appear casual. If anyone looked closely, which they didn’t, they’d see he was really just an older teenager, not a man at all. Worried that he looked out of place he fidgeted constantly, shifting from foot-to-foot, and crossing then uncrossing his arms. The late morning shadows mostly concealed him and this was good. Just a few more moments, he thought…a few more moments. Shabbily dressed in old jeans and sandals, he also wore a plain brown windbreaker over a faded green T-shirt. Unusual with the heat, but no one noticed. The boy’s eyes never stopped moving beneath his lank, black hair but he wasn’t watching the bus. He was trying not to stare at the two uniformed Jews across the street.

They were not the normal blue-shirted Israeli police. These men were soldiers and the boy watched narrowly as they sauntered slowly down the bustling avenue towards a gray Achzarit armored personnel carrier. Both were dressed alike; olive green battle fatigues, tan belts, dusty brown boots and no helmets. With three day beards they were about the same height, though the soldier nearest the street was thicker than his companion. Each man had a stubby, black pistol on his waist, and each carried a compact Tavor assault rifle. These were casually slung around their necks, gripping by the right hand and held muzzle down across their chests. Both wore upper body armor with the Nahal Brigade’s light green berets tucked under their left epaulette. They shouldn’t be here, the boy knew. He’d seen them often enough in Gaza, but never here. Why were they here? For him of course, and he swallowed nervously. No…that couldn’t be.

There was always trouble in Jerusalem these days but here, on the predominantly Jewish side of the city, the soldiers were slightly more relaxed. As the last of the children file on the big yellow bus and the double doors swung closed, the boy nervously licked his dry lips. The soldiers were now on the
other side of the street, but still close enough to pose a threat. Yet if he let the bus pull away far enough to block their view it would be going too fast for him to catch. When the vehicle’s lights stopped flashing it edged away from the curb, and the boy took a final look across the thoroughfare. The two Israelis were watching the bus and talking, but seemed unconcerned. His heart quickened and adrenaline surged, tingling his scalp and fingertips. The bus lurched forward….it was now or never.

Leaping from the shadows, the young man blinked rapidly in the sunlight and stumbled. Recovering his balance, he straightened and ran directly at the bus, one hand clutched tightly to the satchel under his windbreaker. The stocky soldier across the road caught the sudden movement and froze, a cigarette halfway to his lips. In an instant he took in the ragged youth running towards the school bus. The Israeli saw the parcel flopping on the boy’s hip and knew exactly what it was. Springing forward into the street, he snapped the assault rifle to his shoulder, shouting at his partner and ignoring the screeching of tires all around.

The sprinting boy never wavered.

Jumping the curb as the bus gathered speed, he was ten meters away when the driver saw him. Thinking it was merely a stupid pedestrian he only honked but didn’t swerve. Ignoring the horn, the boy’s eyes locked onto the open window near the front of the bus. The same distance away up the street the running soldier twisted sideways, trying to bring his weapon to bear. His sweaty hands slid off the grip and the rifle slipped down, banging his hip as it dangled from the shoulder strap. The second soldier was loping down the road near the curb, trying to get in front of the bus as morning commuters swerved wildly off the road. Pedestrians yelled, well aware of the danger, some waving their arms frantically at the bus driver while others ducked behind parked cars. Tourists were either oblivious to the situation and continued stupidly snapping pictures or, clueless to the danger, simply froze.

“Well, you could ask him anyway, maybe at lunch,” Sarah chided her friend. “Everyone’ll be there…and you don’t want to go alone, do you?”

Movies, especially from America, were a very big deal for the girls.

Brana frowned. “My mother says it’s not proper to ask boys out. She says they never did things like that when she was young.”
“They also didn’t have electricity then so should we sit in the dark!” Sarah scoffed and both girls dissolved in laughter.

Suddenly the side of the bus jolted sideways and Brana jumped, surprised, turning to look from the window. Laughter faded on her lips as she stared, confused, at a face plastered up against the dirty glass. It was a young man with black hair, black eyes, and a narrow, pinched face. Both hands gripped the top of the open window, and for an instant she saw dirty fingernails and whites knuckles as he clutched the hot metal. She started to laugh again, thinking it was just some boy who missed the bus. Then two things happened. First, she saw him let go with one hand and grope for a piece of string flapping against his chest. Then she looked at Sara and saw the fear on her friend’s face.

The stocky soldier slid to his knees in the street, badly gashing the skin, but he didn’t notice. Realizing the bus wasn’t stopping he dove onto the curb, rolling into a prone firing position, and scattering people on the sidewalk. Gasping in the dust the Israeli tried to aim at the figure hanging from the window. His problem was that to hit the boy he had to shoot at a bus full of children. With no more time to think the soldier muttered a prayer, desperately steadied his shaking hands, and squeezed the trigger.

The face against the window was flushed, and she was shocked to see the black eyes filled with hate. Why? I don’t know this boy…why does he hate me? Suddenly the glass shattered and Brana screamed, trying to crouch down and move away at the same time. A strange whizzing noise filled the air, and as Sarah collapsed against the seat, blood pumping from her neck, the boy’s hand found the rope.

The soldier swore and instantly fired again. This time the boy jerked as heavy slugs tore into his skinny body. Salty sweat stung the soldier’s eyes and he was almost sobbing with fear, frantic to get the Arab boy away from the Jewish children. Again, and then again he fired short bursts. Each time he saw the body twitch but the boy would not fall. Finally, aware of the danger, the driver swerved the bus and the few remaining bystanders dove for cover when the big vehicle bounced over the curb. The soldier, almost in slow motion, took careful aim and very deliberately tightened his finger on the trigger one last time.
The boy was dying. He’d felt the tearing pain of the bullets slice into him but he had kept a death grip on the window. “Allahu Akbar!” God is great, he screamed but no one heard. Gripping the rope detonator and yanking forward with his final bit of strength he saw the face of a little girl in a yellow dress.

She was crying.

The soldier’s last bullet struck the Arab squarely in the head, splashing blood and thick, gray chunks of brain along the green stripe on the side of the bus. For a split second, the Israeli thought he’d done it in time but, as the boy’s body tumbled away, the soldier saw smoke sputter and sparks drop away. Cradling his weapon, he rolled sideways towards the nearest building and covered his head.

The last thing Brana saw was a blinding white flash. Like coming out of the souk, she thought, and instinctively covered her face. But as the bomb detonated, the child disintegrated with everyone else in the front half of the bus. Out of control and burning, the vehicle’s shattered remains rolled back over the curb and crashed against a stone storefront.

There was a shocked silence on the street. Everything had happened so fast. Amid the rocks and smoking metal shards littering the sidewalk, a charred scrap of yellow dress floated softly to the curb. Painfully lifting his head, the Israeli soldier gazed at the awful scene. People began appearing from doorways and alleys, running towards the burning bus. A small burning figure tumbled from the wreckage and lay motionless on the hard pavement.

Tears mixed with dust and blood in his beard as the soldier struggled to his feet, blinking and wiping his eyes. His knees were bleeding, and a jagged piece of metal was sticking through his forearm, but the man didn’t feel it. Despite everything he’d seen in his short, violent life this was the worst. Why?

Dragging his bloody leg behind him, he painfully hobbled towards the bus as sirens began their distant, hollow wail. He staggered, clutching his arm and looked east toward the holy mountain. They were only children.

If you really are there ... why?
FROM THE FORMER CULT CHILD’S
HANDYBOOK

a. 1: how not to interact with your famous, also former-cult,
BMX brother

Heidi Hough

DO NOT STARTLE his pit bull, but more importantly, do not have negative
energy around his Chihuahua. They are named after various highs, Smoke,
and Molly, but they are more long-term for him than that. They are his new
family. He will shout at you to leave and turn up his death-metal music if they
don’t like your attitude.

He will push you out and lock the three or four locks on the dou-
ble-metal Echo Park Los Angeles door behind you if you try to come by and
get the pancake grill you left there when it was your rental and you were let-
ting him stay in the room under the stairs.

“There’s no mofo like a preacher’s son,” your landlord, Jerry from
Alabama will say, shaking his head in the graffiti’d driveway while you dig
through trash for that grill when your brother finally gets evicted, in the end.

But in the beginning, round and round we go, optimistic Geneses be-
fore The Falls, when you eagerly zig-zag through tents and needles to pick
your missing brother up from his unexpected arrival at downtown Los An-
geles’ Greyhound station, do not take him home and bring him thrift-store
blankets and chipped mugs of filtered water. This is because later, when you
go back to the east coast to see if your former-cult parents have pulled it to-
gether, and do you have a home to return to? (they haven’t, no you do not)
your brother will tell Jerry you don’t live there anymore and he will change
the locks on you.

C’mon Jerry, you will protest, he doesn’t live there! He has changed
the front living room into bedroom partitions and is subletting to other Lost
Boy BMXers from hard knock lives while he works in Vegas presenting the X-Games and doing other stuff we can’t talk about! But this is the phase where Jerry’s answering machine in Alabama keeps going to voicemail and apparently, his name isn’t even Jerry? And so you move, for now, to Venice Beach.

Your cult brother will not appreciate that you left work in the middle of the day to pick him up and that you cried when you saw him because you love him so much, or that you thought now you were going to finally have someone in your life, on your side, like when you were kids together in the woods, hiding from mom.

Over the years you will watch his YouTube videos and learn he is a role model, with other little PTSD Peter Pan fans all over the world, and a signature bike frame, and a lifetime supply of Yerba Mate iced tea. He will continue to attract fame, like when Smoke is stolen for two years, found in Florida, and brought back across the country with news crews, and the producer of “A Beautiful Mind” starts pitching a Hollywood script about a BMX boy and his dog.

Your brother will contact you to ask you for the somatic touch healer who helped you with trauma, and you should not give him her number because he will show up drunk and expect everything free and she will be angry at you. Because he is talking to you again you will apologize for being a needy color wheel of meltdowns, and try to explain. He will tell you you talk too much and no one wants to hear you, woman.

But there will be one night when you will walk to his Halloween rager from your boyfriend’s place in Silverlake, and you will find him, shirtless, on your old couch, alongside your old piano, in the blacklights behind the stripper pole he’s installed in the middle room, and you will fist-bump him, and for two seconds, Molly will like you, and you will jam out in the backyard to the scruffy metal band, and watch the downtown city lights spin, and you will pass out in the room under the stairs, and, for one night, it will be like you hoped.
Heidi Hough
SAFE HOUSE

Preetha Sebastian

FOR THE LONGEST TIME I believed my house was scentless. Classrooms smelled of pencil shavings and tired ink-scratched notebooks. The school corridors of starched uniforms and pretty girls’ floral deodorants. The neighborhood grocery store of insufficiently bleached counters and stealthily opened, half-eaten candy bars that the bad kids in town abandoned in the store. All these places I frequented unfailingly gave me a new and characteristic smell, but my house had the strange capacity to maintain a severely lacking olfactory character. My nose found my house rather dull, except when food was being cooked in the kitchen, or the floors had just been cleaned.

I’d sit in the living room so I could smell the aromas from the kitchen, shyly wafting its way towards me. Every time I was left with a craving for more of that progressive mixture of smells. It would start with the coconut oil, the key to all traditional Keralite cooking. The oil would heat up in the pan and turn to a slow-rising, invisible vapor. My mother would put mustard and chilies into the pan when the oil was hot enough so that they danced feverishly, and the pungency of those ingredients would instantly but only briefly fill my unsatisfied nostrils. The floors would shine a brilliant white and smell of the generic brand spearmint antiseptic; I can’t recall its name, but I imagine that most people who use it wouldn’t be able to.

Even when I bathed with too much of the the Pears saffron gel bars my parents bought in stock (almost as if they wanted all of us to smell the same), I’d find that the bathroom quickly turned back to being as scentless as it was before. I’d shut the exhaust fan window that opened up to the outside and close the doors to trap the smell-carrying steam, but it made no difference. My over-soaped skin would squeak against my palms from my useless efforts. Even my parents’ perfumes, sprayed sparingly and only special occasions, would only linger for a moment. It was as though the house was a scent-sucking vortex.
Even the pristine Dubai streets had smells; the sweat from the men in bright orange jumpsuits who would sweep the roads tirelessly like warriors against the blistering heat, sun-stricken concrete bricks with sand and dust trapped between the cracks, reflected light and heat from glass buildings and polished new cars with engines that gave off petrol vapours. My house was, somehow, immune to the smells of the outside.

But sometimes, it had periods of weakness, quelled stubbornness. On occasion, dozens of strangers, friends of my parents, would be invited to our house. The white square tiles were cleaned so that not a speck of dirt lay in between the lines, all the glass counter tops were wiped down so they sparkled under the lights from the chandelier and then my mother would pull out the biggest weapon against the house’s odorlessness from its secret hiding place. I only ever saw that opaque spray can - a deep turquoise blue, the rim an excessive gold and with an illegible brand name in white cursive - when it was in the hands of my mother. I would have asked to be the one to spray it, but my mother would flit across the room so quickly she would never have heard me. Besides, even the tiniest spray was overwhelming. I don’t think I even trusted myself with that kind of chemical flower power. Just when the house had forced the spray can smell to settle, the guests would start coming into the house and then into the living room in a torrent, and I would give up my seat before anybody asked. I would bump against their freshly-bathed bodies as I made my way out of the living room, my head touching their midriffs, my nostrils breathing-in air that was suddenly heavier by the intermingling of perfume and cologne.

After the strangers left, I imagined the house taking deep long breaths, expelling foreign scents in a polite amount of time; enough time for me to pause and sniff the sofa the strangers had sat on. Each part of it had a different smell and it fascinated me how a piece of furniture had anchored in all these distinctive traces in its one-and-a-half foot rectangular space. If I paused over one section too long, though, the smell would disappear. And time, with enough soullessness, could kill every scent. These couch-sniffing experiments as a little girl made me understand that people were really what brought smells to places. And my house wasn’t to blame. It was my home, the most familiar
place in the world, and all its smells became an inseparable part of me, so that I was never be able to distinguish the different essences of its character.
JUNE, 1924

Stephen P. Hull

SUMMER BEGAN ON the day the hired man got his arm caught in the row-tiller and had to be taken into town on a wagon. He was not the Van Arsdale’s regular tenant farmer — that was Tom Hainey. This other man had wandered into town looking for work at the start of the planting and been hired to help with corn and alfalfa and to do general work around the place. He’d managed to get his left arm caught between the hitch and the traveling tiller of the new Farmall machine, and Tom didn’t hear him holler, “wait!” before he let out the clutch and clanked into gear. The Farmall was a wonder: big as a shed, red as the devil, two and half tons of iron and confusion. When it showed up at the Van Arsdale’s that spring every landowner and tenant farmer in Upper Merion and King of Prussia made a point to pay a visit, one after the other, to see for himself whether it would do the work of six men and horses, like the signs plastered on barns and stores up and down the county all promised. It was gas-powered, which accounted for the unmuffled blat of the big one-cylinder engine that became a roar when Tom gave it some throttle, completely drowning out the increasingly frightened shouts of the hired man. Then Tom eased the big tractor down into the irrigation ditch between the north and south sections of the cornfield, and rose up the far side. It wasn’t a very deep ditch but the incline was enough to pinch the hired man’s arm off just north of the elbow. Tom said later he didn’t know what it was that made him turn around in the hard metal seat to look back.

“I couldn’t hear nothing,” he said. “But I saw him just settin down in the middle of a row holding something, and I knew it weren’t right. Maybe I smelled the blood,” he told folks later.

It was nearly three o’clock when Augustus Bell heard the shouting on the road outside. At that moment he was poised on the very edge of his chair in Father Witold’s sixth-grade mathematics class, the last class of the day, on the last
day of the year. His back was rod straight. His eyes were focused on the blackboard, his hands and feet did not fidget or bounce. He was to all appearances the picture of concentration, as Father Witold instructed them in mathematical values and attitudes:

“Mathematics reflects the order and unity in God’s universe, and contributes to the development of the whole man by enriching one’s life with the conviction that nothing lies outside His knowledge and power.” The Father was the most senior teacher on the faculty, and he wore an old-style cassock, with dribble stains on the front and drifts of dandruff at the shoulders. The outfit was thoroughly antique, and had no pockets, so that he was constantly searching around him for where he had just put something down, and was reliant on one of the boys to carry his things.

In reality, that afternoon Augustus was already long gone from St. Stanislaus School. He had learned the trick of seeming present when instead he was far away. At the moment he was at the Marne, peering over the top of a trench towards the German lines 200 yards away through no-man’s land. His right hand gripped his officer’s issue Browning .45 and he raised his left arm, waiting for the shriek of the whistle and the plunge up and over. At first he mistook the shouting on the road for the shouting of his soldiers, and he only gradually, and regretfully, came back to the present moment to hear Father Witold going on: “Through mathematics God’s will is illuminated and made plain to the man of disciplined mind and pure spirit. For your homework over the summer…,” here the Father paused, with satisfaction, to await the groans he knew would follow the admission there would be summer schoolwork, but instead the class, as if it were a single body, became suddenly aware of the commotion outside, shook itself awake like a young dog, and began moving. Augustus, whose posture and expression were good cover for a hair-trigger, bolted from his chair and was the first to the door, as the other boys, and Father Witold too, crowded out behind him.

Outside was a scene like one of the Bosch paintings in Sister Bertha’s Art History book. A man walked just behind the wagon, looking nowhere but down at his feet. He was white as a sheet and for some reason was carrying a man’s work boot. Tom Hainey perched alone on the seat holding the reins of an old, dirty white draft horse. Men and women walked alongside the wagon,
sometimes peering inside and gasping, sometimes stopping in their tracks and
turning around as if looking for something, which made the people following
the wagon veer around and walk bang into each other. Two men trotted along
in front of the horse shouting for a doctor and generally raising the alarm,
over which Augustus could hear, rising and falling like a siren, the terrible gur-
gling moans coming from the back of the wagon. Every so often the moans
would stop, and there would follow a set of shrieks that went through him
like a knife scraping on bone: Eeeee-Eeee; Eeeee-Eeee; Eeeee-Eeee; three
sets of two each, without variation. Even though Tom flicked at the reins the
horse didn’t seem to speed up, but kept plodding on at a maddening pace. Au-
gustus wanted to look in the wagon and see who or what could be suffering
so, but Father Witold elbowed him out of the way, looked over the rim of the
wagon bed himself, and muttered a prayer. He said to Tom,

“Can you go no faster? Will he live?”

Tom Hainey, who Augustus knew had actually been at the Marne, said,

“He’ll be all right. If he goes quiet is the time to worry.”

Soon they were well into town and nearly up to the fire station. Joe
Planck, Tim Currow, and some of the other volunteers came outside to see
what the fuss was. Two of them grabbed the bridle either side of the old
horse’s head and did their best to pull, hurry, and chivvy her along, while Joe
deputized two men to run ahead to tell the doctor they were coming.

Father Witold seemed to feel he ought to be the one in charge, but
he gave no obvious signs that he knew what to do. He walked alongside the
wagon with the others, muttering a low prayer and looking every so often at
God’s suffering creature laid out next to him, as if he expected him to take
comfort in his ministry, and arise and walk. Instead, the man in the wagon
gave another teeth-grinding series of shrieks, and the Father said to the men
holding the horse’s bridle, “Oh hurry up, will you!”

Augustus thought it was as if a circus had come to King of Prussia,
and was banging and hallo-ing up the main street on the way to get the key
to the city. In addition to most of the St. Stanislaus boys it seemed all the men
and women in all the stores lining Main Street had joined the wagon’s slow
progression. Newcomers shouted greetings and wondered aloud what was
happening, and those closest to the wagon shushed them, and the hired man groaned and shrieked some more.

Finally they reached the doctor’s office, upstairs from the apothecary on the corner of the Allendale road. Dr. Weisskopf was outside waiting with a stretcher, and he had his nurse and his office girl with him. A dozen or so of the wagon contingent broke off and surged up to him, a self-important body of delegates with news that couldn’t wait, but the doctor ignored them and walked out to meet the wagon. This was the cue for people to quiet down, all but the hired man, who continued to groan and sob at a volume that increased as the doctor went around back of the wagon and began to examine him. Father Witold moved to stand next to the doctor, offering a Latin catechism, and Augustus slipped through the crowd behind the two men and, peering through the space between them, finally got a glimpse of the chaos.

The floor of the wagon was made of wide, coarse-grained boards, split and gaping, askew in places, and Augustus’ first thought was that the man lying there would get splinters, before he realized splinters wouldn’t bother him much. Blood was everywhere, soaking the man’s clothes from his chin down to his knees, and the floor was awash in blood and there was blood splashed on the side of the wagon closest to the horror poking out of his shirt below the shoulder. A tongue of skin lolled nakedly out of the bloody cloth. It was drained of all color, whiter even than the mean knife-end of bone protruding several inches beyond the knob where the arm ended. He could see blood pulsing weakly along the bone and dripping in a pool on the floorboard.

Augustus heard the doctor swear under his breath, and say, “Good Christ, how long has he been this way?” Without waiting for an answer he signaled for the stretcher, pointed to the four men closest by, and said, “Carry him up. Be quick and for god’s sake don’t drop him.”

As they lifted the man on the stretcher the doctor glanced in the wagon bed and saw, in a far corner, a burlap sack twisted closed at the top and bulging redly at the bottom. Augustus was closest, and he tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Scoot up and get that for me, son.” Augustus snatched up the bag and jumped down with it. It was heavy, like carrying a whole ham, and Augustus knew without looking he was holding the poor man’s arm.
“Follow on upstairs with that,” the doctor said. Some of the other boys crowded around, and Father Witold snapped his fingers at them peevishly.

“Let’s have a look,” Bob Cleary said, and started to grab the bag. Augustus pulled it back and opened it at the same time, and they all held their breath, and craned their necks. The arm looked peaceful. The shirtsleeve was buttoned at the wrist, and the back of the hand was stippled with coarse black hairs lying flat and even. The fingernails were dirty and very short, and on the third finger there was the flash of a thin, gold wedding band. A smell came up out of the bag like an old forest floor after it rained. A man he didn’t know stepped up to Augustus, who seemed to have been deputized by the doctor, and handed him a dirty work boot. “He’ll need this,” the man told him. Augustus looked at the severed arm and the old boot, unaccountably still laced, and suddenly he felt all woozy. His eyelids drooped and his stomach rose, and as he started to drop the bag he felt it suddenly lifted from his hands and he heard Tom Hainey say, “I’ll take those. Boys, go on home.”

Before he went inside Father Witold turned at the threshold and looked back at the knot of St. Stanislaus boys. It seemed to Augustus that he might start off on another prayer, or a lesson about the order and unity in God’s universe, as if one were needed. But he only cleared his throat.

“School,” he said, “is concluded.”

* * *

On days with no work that summer most of the town boys and some of the farm boys went to the park out at the lake. It was a two-mile walk from town, but shorter from Augustus’ house, and from the bright, hot, sheet pan road he would duck onto a path beneath tall pines and descend the cool dark quarter-mile to the lake. The path was narrow and overhung, with shafts of sunlight stabbing through the shadows and only birdsong for company, until it opened suddenly like a river delta, spilling him out onto a wide beach of dirt and pine needles before a magnificent expanse of wind whipped water. On a given Saturday afternoon there could be two hundred people there – many more on Decoration Day, Labor Day, and the Fourth of July, when a band
would play in the old wood gazebo and Joe Planck and his volunteer crew set off fireworks.

On a weekday seventy or eighty young people would congregate the beach and the park. Some of Augustus’ St. Stanislaus crowd would be there, but mostly it would be kids and teenagers from the local public schools, not only in King of Prussia but Upper Merion and even Conshohocken Station. The thing that made these summer lake days distinct from all other days on Augustus’ calendar was the generous addition of the girls. There would be dozens of girls, some younger, some older, some just his age: a dizzying array of girls in groups, and girls sitting singly on a blanket with a book. Young mothers with young children, and high school girls with that year’s bobbed hair and swimming costumes that stopped above their knees. Augustus would sit and watch this tidal flow, let it wash over him til his mind was silent and his heart beat in rhythm with the waves. He watched as a few of the girls set off in a determined crawl across the lake, but they were soon lost to his sight. Most of the girls just laughed and splashed in the water. They bought ice cream cones from the snackbar, they changed in and out of their costumes in the bath huts perched in a line under the shade of the trees, and they talked and shouted with a wild music that it seemed he could hear for the first time only this summer.

When his friends came he would quit his reverie and join them in the water for a game of rag-tag, or water polo if they could find a rubber ball. These were rough games that combined the exacting geometry of ballistics with the adolescent idea of murder, and loose teeth and bloody noses sometimes resulted. Several of the boys — Fred Duda, Sam Prentiss, and Bob Cleary — were two years older than Augustus, and at fourteen were making every conscious effort to parade their skinny physiques, bulging Adams’ apples, and cracking voices in front of as many girls as possible without, however, quite going to the length of coming right up to them to say hello. That didn’t stop them from trying to get a peek at them in the bath huts, though.

On Thursday, a week to the day after the incident with the hired man and the wagon, at the end of a viciously martial game of rag-tag at the lake, Bob Cleary reported he’d seen Clara Andrews slip into a bath hut with Jim Sheridan. This was news on the order of the Phillies and the Athletics squaring
off in the World Series. Clara Andrews was a creature out of myth: beautiful, distant, and forbidding as Helen of Troy, a local girl spirited off to Barnard College in New York where, it was reported, she’d appeared in a Broadway revue and been seen on the arm of a Barrymore. That she’d be with Jim Sheridan confirmed a basic belief – or at least, an increasingly strong suspicion – that the St. Stanislaus boys all shared: that to the victor go the spoils. The evidence all around them showed that a life devoted to winning at sports, at school, at dancing, at being a lifeguard, at training your muscles to bulge and ripple just so, and at having all the girls flock around you, beat the pants off a life devoted to church, and catechism, and Jesuitical reasoning, and Father Witold’s summer homework. It beat it all to hell, and the proof of it was that Jim Sheridan, with his tanned muscles and his scholarship to Princeton, was “making whoopee,” whatever that might entail, with none other than Clara Andrews right at this very minute, not forty yards away in the beach hut with the blue awning and green door.

The four boys walked with extreme nonchalance across the beach and partway up the path before setting off into the woods like stealthy Iroquois. Over snapping twigs and under low hanging branches they made their way behind the row of bath huts. They moved in a line, with Augustus at the rear, to the boundary between forest and beach, the very edge of terra incognita, where the bath hut in question, the third in a line of eight, might if they were lucky have a gap in the boards or a missing pine knot that would afford them a glimpse of the unknown.

It did.

Fred, who was oldest, had a first look, and he stayed so long kneeling by the knothole that Bob, who was next, kept hissing in his ear and yanking him by the shoulder. Finally he succeeded in pulling him away, and as he took his place Fred reeled back into the woods, a look on his face of extreme calm and pious wisdom, or possibly blank shock.

“What’d you see?” Sam whispered.

“I saw plenty, I guess. I can’t… well, you just wait and see.”

When it was Sam’s turn Bob came skipping back to the group with a grin.

“I’ll tell you what, its better ‘n any French postcard!” he said.
Then it was Augustus’ turn. “Hurry up,” Bob hissed at him. “I want another look.” Augustus crept down over the twigs and pinecones til he was kneeling on a bed of dirt and pine needles behind the bath hut. The knothole was low down on the right side so that he had to scrunch and put his left cheek against the rough wood. He closed his right eye and opened his left. At first he wasn’t sure he could see anything. The inside of the bath hut was suffused with a dim light; Augustus realized the jalousies on the front door were louvered closed. He became aware of a soft rhythmic sound, pock-pock-pock, like clapping your moccasins together to shake off the dust. He saw gray forms, indistinct, moving in unison, and heard steady breathing like a swimmer showing good form, and then a sharp high intake of breath. Then he saw her face. It stood out clearly in the soft light, enveloped in a cloud of blonde hair. One wet streak of hair was plastered across her cheek. Her eyes were closed, her lips were open, and Augustus could see her tongue inside her open mouth. All the lessons of suffering and ardor, the parables of beatification, the ecstasy of the Magdalen and of one saint after another could not prepare Augustus for this moment. The woman’s face ought to have been familiar to him from the paintings, the colorful, composed Tintoretto’s, Caravaggio’s and Michelangelo’s populating Sister Bertha’s big book. But he didn’t think this was anything like that at all. All his life Augustus had grown up around animals: he’d seen cattle, pigs, plenty of dogs, and even horses mating with matter of fact abandon. But the look on Clara Andrews face was the most frankly animal thing Augustus had ever seen. It filled him with a fierce compulsion. It made him want to paw at the earth. It made him want to stay right here watching ’til he turned to stone; and it made him want to run and dive into the lake, and swim for the far shore until all his muscles ached and his breath became ragged, and he sank deep down to the cold mud at the bottom and died and finally met God, whom he now firmly believed might just look like Clara Andrews.

But Augustus had stayed too long, and now he had the attention of the Park Ranger, who checked behind the bath huts from time to time on the lookout for just this sort of delinquency.

“Hey, you!” he shouted.

Augustus started up slowly, as dozy and enchanted as Odysseus.

“Hold it right there,” the Ranger said, and started toward him.
With that, Augustus was off, flitting through the woods, dodging roots and rocks, jumping over the tree stumps and the deadfalls while the Ranger crashed along behind him, grunting and swearing.

“I see you, Augie Bell!” he panted, already far behind.

Augustus didn’t stop or look back, and soon the crashing and swearing ceased and he heard, from far away through the trees,

“Wait until I tell your father!”
FIRST DATE (DEATH’S DESIRE)

A.M. Spo!

The hand
On my back gives me chills—
Like spiders crawling
Up and down my
Spine,
Up my neck
And crawling through
The forest of thoughts
Beneath my scalp.
    (A handful fall down below,
     Tickling me anywhere).
These creatures are hungry
    Always.

Except—
These spiders cocoon me
From the world,
Or maybe they create
A real one.
The spiders harvest
Me
Like a new organ,
Linking me to another web,
Creating one pulse—
A micro-intergalactic surgery:
An anomaly, like
    A stain
    On the whitest of sheets.
As I walk across
The street with this hand
On my back,
I feel kidnapped—
Stringed
Up from the Moon
And reeled in
To shield me from harsh
Rays of Sun—
Only luminescent
In Dark as
I hang limp from the stars
For all to see
   (and judge).

The spiders don’t scare me—
They enlighten me
And keep trespassers away.
They never feed on me,
But on those who try to sabotage
The webbed grotto
Within my chest.
       (A blood-filled balloon
            No one dares to hold—
All fearing, and no-knowing).
It beats when it wants—
Like an eager-eyed
man home
    alone (always alone)
In front of a
   pulsating
LCD screen—
Passions that become hobbies,
But clocks stop for
No one—not even for two.
   (Romantic comedies do the dance,
    But never close the deal.
Dead bodies everywhere).

Although this hand—
Indestructibly irresistible
And yet
   Bizarrely
Graceful, like a puppeteer-ed
Conductor of a symphony of swans
Too loud for human ears—
Shields my back from
The knives
Of Caesarix¹-haters
And transcends the ‘invisible hands’²
Of human understanding.

Yet, another hand—
Relentlessly inevitable
With Time—
Will wipe
   (all)
our webs away,
And the body linked
To this hand will be
But a squashed
Spider beneath
A shoe.
Sexual cannibalism kills (me)n,
But so does life.

The first date catapults me
To the end,
He must be
The one.
NOTES

1. Reference to Shakespeare’s play Julius Caesar in combination with the feminine gendered ‘dominatrix’ (i.e., a dominating woman, often linked to sadism).

2. Reference to Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations.
Jennifer C. Cormack
NECTAR

Jennifer C. Cormack

It was late afternoon in a picture perfect July
when I walked from my apartment to town,
nose in a book. I circumvented the U-Haul ramp,
the kayak in the pick-up truck, the toddler wagon,

but not the maple branch and arrived
thirty minutes early at an empty bus stop,
not for a bus, heaven help me, but for church—
the Saturday service—to begin across the street.

If I entered early, a wellspring of strangers,
I mean brothers, would want to converse
when I preferred to revel in heaven’s noise
silently, in obscurity, alone with my God

to feel the wind whip the pages of my book,
watch a bumblebee drop between breezes
into the bus stop while I sipped color from the sun,
storing its nectar for a nest of homesick woes.
Mary Ann Hunt
LOVE AT FIRST PUNCH

Mary Ann Hunt

Under the gym’s florescent lights
I punched
For the first time
It was love at first
Cold clean contact
It was the sound
The intoxicating POP
Like a child
Learning to write
I traced
The instructor’s motions
Slowly with my arms
Then with shoulder blades
Obliques
And those back muscles
I don’t know the names of

Jab-jab-cross. Jab-jab-cross.
Jab-cross. Uppercut-cross
Like a Sufi
In ecstasy
Oblivious to the
Aching muscles
And streams of sweat
Eventually
On the balls of my feet
Hips torqueing to the
Rapid fire smacks
The intoxicating POP
Somewhere in my mind
Somewhere in the
Not so distant past
He had me
On the ropes
My head teetering
About to fall off
Into insanity
On the ropes
My eyes about to roll
Back in my head
On the ropes
Summoning the person
I used to be
I stumbled forward

He throws
His same old jab
Words
To antagonize me
Rile me
And draw me out
But I am better trained
Now I slip
Frustrated
He throws another
To my weak spot
He knows so well
Motherhood
Again
Too predictable
Plus
It’s a decoy
Designed
To draw my eye away
To confuse me

But months of floor exercises
Have armored
My underside
No eight count in sight
Shoulders still up
I advance
Set my feet
For my favorite
Right uppercut
Then
Drawing back
And focusing
All the power
Of my right side
I hammer
A right cross
His only defense
His offense
Now gone
I am punching shadows
DIAGNOSING [FE{MALE}] PAN(SEXUALIS)

A.M. Spo!

Voluntary Voice:
Dearest Mother,
Why is that
Man over there trying
On a dress?

Involuntary Body:
Throat convulses,
Eyes fixed,
Nervous little feminine
Hands toying with the hem
Of a school skirt—
Heart beating to
The herniated melody of
Overeager soldiers
Charging and stomping
To war—
Acrimonious mantras
Silenced to mere ripples
In the sea of consciousness—

My war is hollowed

To the internal bleeding

Of my identity.

Id:
The appetite to touch,
Poetry

To stroke,
To poke,
To feel,
To hold
Was provoking every
Fiber and nerve of
My being as I sat on the bench
In the dress store,
Fingering
My own pre-pubescent
Stubble on my
Legs, wondering what it
Would feel like;
Marveling at how the
Chicanery of such
A tight fitted dress on
Such robust, fuzzy
Thighs would warrant such
Involuntary reason
For a girl to
Salivate.

“Look away, look away.
Stop staring.”
Such muscular, sculpted
Calves: positioned,
Poised, and showcased
In such lovely red
Stilettos,
Flexing and pulsing with each step
And lean
As differed colored sequined
Gowns shifted
And drifted down the
Racks of clearance items—
None good enough for
The lavishness of such an
Omnipotent vision of
Deviance.

    Super Ego:
Snickers and sneers
Followed by shuffled
Footsteps down
Staid paths
Of traditional jeers—
Unyielding—
At the abnormal,
The morass, an addled
Surreptitious haecceity under
A probing exegesis.

This wayward gentlewo(man)—
The tempestuous
Strut—
Had me on the precipice
Of beautitude;
The dresses now
Yield gloomy glints of a
Sepulchral nature in
The midst of
Concupiscent xanadu.

    Ego:
Furtive glances excite
My umbridged malediction.
And yet, my failed attempts at
Performing my limerence
Results in a relaxed, receding
Rift in the audience’s posture
As sighs of relief
Loom in my mind
From voices that aren’t
Mine.

I’ll put on the powder and
Gloss, trick and deceive,
But my heart will continue
To grieve—

*

The Unconscious (The Stage Manager):
The play has ended—begone!
Fictional romances never
Appease all onlookers,
Just as some killers
Prefer a knife to a
Gun: the intimacy
In death as uncanny
As one’s birth;
Cut the creature
Open, and what do you
See?

To the characters who live
Alien science fiction—
The fish bowl was tainted
Long ago;
When the curtain closes,
Continue to breathe
And parade your tail.
Ingest red lipticks
And paint those
Roses redder than
The ink that corrects
You.

Human suits
Preferred over
Clown capes,
Perfunctory effigies
Exacerbate avant-guard
Psyches—
A plethora of fire
Could not
Expunge this innate
Blasphemy on civilization’s
Whitest of sheets.

Supra Ego:
The things they loath
Become the things I love:
All their demons swallowed
With but a yawn from
A little girl.
My outward form remains,
But all hell
is within.
PERICHORESIS

for Abby Altman

Jennifer C. Cormack

The studio glows with morning light,
gilding our sanctuary with promise
as a perpetual rhythm of color and canvas
and creativity weaves above rafters, through
the banister, around empty paint-stained
chairs and settles outside on the window sill
where a pair of fledgling sparrows huddle
to welcome the day with birdsong.

Dirty smocks litter the floor from yesterday’s
evening class while unfinished paintings,
like poems, snooze under the table, stretch
out on easels, dry in attic heat, waiting
for the dance to begin.

From the tabletop music stand Shroff Manor
trumpets its song of completion while Sailor’s
prodigious blank canvas drowns
in a sea of possibility surrounded
by the vases and grapes, ducks and flowers
of former students, who stood, like yourself,
distanced from the easel for a gallery view.

On the canvas before you a brush waits
for your attention to detail, ever poised
to chase the fugitive pear after dark
or skip along Marvin Pond past
a bellowing rooster to reflect the light
of your classic self in the eternal dance.
PART II: CULTURAL STUDIES & GLOBALIZATION
SELF-DEFENSE IN THE
HOMELAND SECURITY STATE
Emily Hedges

IS THE RALLYING cry “Black Lives Matter,” a collective “over-reaction” to a series of unrelated incidents involving the killing of African American men by white police officers? Was the shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teen, and the institutional racism within the Ferguson Police Department, the story of one flawed precinct? Using the methodology employed by Donald Pease in his book, *The New American Exceptionalism*, I will show how domestic police departments, like the one in Ferguson, are acting out the terms of the Homeland Security State fantasy foreign policy. We see this in the militarization of police forces and the troubling interpretation of what constitutes the self-defense justification of lethal force. I will argue that America’s best hope for securing the safety of the Homeland is to demand that lethal self-defense only be used in cases of “imminent” not “preeminent” danger. Until we affirm this rule of law in our war on the universal terrorist, the United States will continue to see the same script played out on the streets of America, against our own disenfranchised citizens.

Michael Brown and Imminent Threat

Around noon on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2014, Officer Darren Wilson identified Brown and his companion as fitting the description of two men alleged to have stolen cigars from a nearby convenience store. Wilson ordered the men out of the middle of the street and onto the sidewalk. They ignored him, so Wilson blocked their path with his police SUV. When Wilson opened the door it hit Brown, who then slammed it shut on Wilson. Brown reached into the SUV through the driver’s open window and punched Wilson. Wilson pulled his gun. Brown grabbed for it and was shot through the hand. Bloodstains confirm that Brown ran at least 180 feet away from the SUV. Rather than waiting
for backup, Wilson pursued, claiming that he feared for pedestrian safety. After running about 180 feet, Brown turned and came back towards Wilson. Wilson, “fearing for his life,” fired 10 shots. The order of the shots fired cannot be determined. However, the DOJ concluded the shot to the head that killed Brown was more than likely the last one. The trajectory of the bullet was downward, forward, and to the right. Brown could not have been standing straight when Wilson fired this bullet because Wilson is slightly shorter than Brown. Brown was likely bent at the waist or falling forward when he received this wound. (DOJ 18) The DOJ investigation concluded in a report dated March 4, 2015 that the evidence did not support an indictment of Wilson. The report stated that: “The use of deadly force is justified when the officer has ‘probable cause’ to believe that the suspect poses a threat of serious physical harm, either to the officer or to others. Deadly force can be reasonably employed where an officer believes that the suspect’s actions place him, or others in the immediate vicinity, in imminent danger of death or serious bodily injury.” (DOJ 10)

While this reading of self-defense may have justified Wilson’s use of his weapon in the beginning, the DOJ report clearly shows that Brown ceased to pose “imminent danger” prior to receiving the deadly shot to his head. According to Black’s Law Dictionary, the law of self-defense, as it is applied by the courts, turns on two requirements: the force must have been “necessary” and it must have been “reasonable.” It is obvious that the DOJ considered Brown an imminent threat while bent from multiple gunshots, and that use of deadly force was deemed “reasonable.” What they haven’t done is provide the demarcation for when that “reasonableness” ceases to exist—if there is one.

This is one of many similar, high-profile cases involving the killing of black men by white officers claiming self-defense. In most cases, officers were ruled justified in their lethal self-defense because the suspect attempted to take their weapon, a fact that is hard to prove and rarely questioned. (Drehle 28-29)

In an April 20, 2015 *Time* magazine article, attorney Benjamin Crump, who represents the families of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice, said: “I’ve represented dozens of families of unarmed people of color who have been killed by police officers. And if I had a dollar for every time the reason given by the police was that ‘they reached for my weapon’ or ‘they
attacked me and I felt in fear for my life,’ I wouldn’t have enough room in my pockets.” (Crump 30)

Many in the international community are taking notice. After the parents of Michael Brown testified before the U.N. in Switzerland, the U.N. Committee Against Torture released a report criticizing the “excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, in particular against persons belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups.” Christof Heyns, U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions said: “The laws of many of the States in the U.S. are much more permissive [than international law] in creating an atmosphere where there are not enough constraints on the use of force.” (Izadi) Heyns comments show that the international community questions the line America draws between reasonable and excessive force, and that this line is particularly blurry when it comes to citizens of color.

Why are domestic police departments using excessive force in particular against persons belonging to certain racial and ethnic groups? To answer this, I will draw on the scholarship of Nikhil Pal Singh from his essay, “The Whiteness of Police,” to look at the role race has played in the development of America’s policing system.

The “Universal Terrorist” at Home

Singh explained how “policing what comes to be denoted as crime—from mild correction to justifiable homicide—was the essence of slave and frontier law.” It came about as a way of protecting and ensuring private property within the public order through legalized violence. It began as a slave patrol, a group formed from citizen volunteers, whose purpose was to prevent insurrections. (Singh 1091) From the beginning, there existed a troubled relationship between African Americans and the police—the former reacting to oppression and the latter designating resistance as “crime.”

The same point was made in the August 24, 2015 Time magazine article titled, “What It’s Like Being a Cop Now.” Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey pointed to the history of policing as a major reason for the current unrest. “If you were in the South, you might have been tracking down slaves...Who enforced Jim Crow laws? Police.” (Vick 39)
Singh points out that the slave patrol’s ability to render their actions legal allowed them to “criminalize the counter-violence of dominated people…” This allowed the powerful to institutionalize and legitimate suppressive police force, as well as disavowal of the fact that the counter-violence was a product of white violence. “Beneath any such ideological ruminations or psychic processes lay the practical concern: how to both defend and legitimate a social order built on ongoing murder and dispossession, that is, the theft of black labor and indigenous lands.” (Singh 1093) In order to continue to “defend and legitimate” these ongoing actions, the white social order had to view African Americans as inherently “criminal,” especially in cases of black counter-violence. As with slave patrols, no distinction is made between what constitutes “reasonable” and “excessive” police violence.

According to Singh, “whiteness” comes from the regulation of property and its concern with those who have none, who are “imagined to harbor a potentially criminal disregard for propertied order.” (Singh 1091) He points to a quote by Benjamin Franklin stating a popular belief that “the majority of Negroes are of a plotting disposition, dark, sullen, malicious, revengeful, and cruel in the highest degree…” (Singh 1098) Thomas Jefferson argued that emancipation would produce an imminent threat to all of society because blacks would seek revenge for the crimes done to them, and whites would live in fear of retribution that “urged preemptive violence.” Singh calls statements such as these “slippages” containing important truth: “Regardless of its source or etiology (white oppression or black nature), the racial line constructing civil life marked a materially and existentially consequential mistrust born of criminal acts.” (Singh 1091) From the perspective of power, the black community is imagined to hold no property or potential beyond a pre-disposition towards crime and ongoing pre-imminent threat, which requires “rigorous and ongoing applications of ‘legitimate’ violence along a potentially limitless vector.” (Singh 1096) Within our society, African Americans are considered already guilty of theft and violence before the action has occurred.

We saw this view played out in images of military police called in to protect private property during Hurricane Katrina, even before rescue efforts commenced. (Pease, Exceptionalism 203) After the Michael Brown shooting, many news outlets focused on the looting that went on during the protests.
Even Fox News commentator Bill O’Reilly made a point of coming back from vacation when Michael Brown was shot because he was “furious” at the way the incident was being covered by the media. In this broadcast of the “O’Reilly Factor” from Aug. 20, 2014, O’Reilly wanted to illuminate the “real” story—outrageous looting in the streets of Ferguson. He also pointed out that protestors needed to remember that Brown stole cigarettes prior to being shot by Wilson. (O’Reilly)

Exaggeration of a black threat of violence to people and property may also be seen in statistics from the New York Police Department’s (NYPD) stop and frisk program. Since 2004, the NYPD conducted four million stops and an estimated 2.3 million frisks; more than 81 percent targeted black and Latino residents. Only 1.5 percent resulted in discovery of a weapon; six percent resulted in an arrest. Singh summed it up when he stated: “Franklin doubted that ‘mild laws could govern such a people,’ which is to say that he affirmed the whiteness of police.” (Singh 1098)

Is there a correlation between the legal, preemptive killing of black men at home and America’s use of drones to execute suspected terrorists abroad? An answer may be found within American exceptionalist ideology, state fantasy work, and national anxiety over the ultimate threat to life, liberty, and the pursuit to happiness—the universal terrorist.

American Exceptionalism and the State of Exception

In his book *The New American Exceptionalism*, cultural theorist Donald Pease explains that fantasies don’t offer escape from reality, but rather they construct the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic aspect. “The fantasy frame is constructed so that we experience our world as a wholly consistent and transparently meaningful order.” (Pease, States of Fantasy) The traumatic aspect of American history involves the treatment of African, Native and Mexican Americans.

Fantasy is what allowed Americans to see themselves as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and to render the “traumatic” treatment of minority groups as “manifest destiny” and “God’s will.” Throughout the nation’s history, American exceptionalism has remained the overarching fantasy inform-
A critical moment in the story of American fantasy came with the cold war. Because of the magnitude of the threat—communism and nuclear annihilation—Americans authorized the suspension of the rules of law in order to protect the entire order. Pease (following the scholarship of Carl Schmitt) called this the “State of Exception.” (Pease 26) During the years of the cold war, this state of exception naturalized into the National Security State—a beast that needed to be fed even after the cold war ended. The first President Bush attempted to do this by introducing the New World Order with Saddam Hussein as the organizing threat. During Operation Desert Storm, televised war images attempted to represent the nation winning a war against an enemy stand-in for the communist threat. However, Hussain could not inspire the necessary fear to establish an effective justification for the National Security State. Bush’s New World Order fantasy came to an end when it met what Pease terms a “limit figure”—a person or event that can’t be contained within a state fantasy, which results in the revelation of its limits. This occurred in 1993 with the televised beating of Rodney King, a black resident of Los Angeles, by the police department. According to Pease, when citizens viewed the beating of King, it caused a rift in the fantasy with two important outcomes: it revealed the disenfranchised, minority populations who were not included in the New World Order, and it made visible the violence Americans were enacting overseas. According to Pease, King represented a limit figure, which exposed the limits of the fantasy and caused the nation to “open up a correlative critical standpoint on the police action in Iraq.” (Pease, Exceptionalism 43) In other words, the image of police beating King caused Americans to see their country’s actions abroad in a new perspective.

With the dismantling of the New World Order, the country looked inward for anorganizing threat to justify the National Security State. The result was an American culture divided into a dual fantasy organized around conflicting worldviews—worldviews that could not be more evident than in the 2016 Presidential election. They began as the New Covenant with America represented by Bill Clinton with those who insisted on monocultural nationalism;
and the Contract with America, organized by Newt Gingrich, who saw multicultural liberalism as the threat to American way of life. (Pease, *Exceptionalism* 97) Because these fantasies were organized around the fundamental role that non-white Americans should hold within the nation, and within America’s historical narrative, racial difference took on a heightened significance. I believe the black man became what Pease terms a “symptom figure”—the necessary element for fantasy work to succeed. These are individuals who represent to the nation the cause of all the inconsistencies within their way of viewing the world.

State fantasy remained divided until citizens viewed the planes crash into the Twin Towers on 9/11. Finally, Americans had a global threat to equal that of the communists: Muslim extremists, who unlike the communists, can be reduced to the creation of terror without any underlying ideology to provide frame of reference. Without borders, without ideology, these “others” provided the necessary global enemy to unite the country in its willingness to cede civil liberties in exchange for protection. Bush’s Homeland Security State was inaugurated with the War on Terror. Rather than a nation divided in its governing fantasy, the Nation (the vulnerable citizens in need of protection) was now divided from the State (the entity doing the protecting through the State of Exception) into mutually exclusive spheres (Pease, *Exceptionalism* 181)

One thing remained unchanged: the same populations who were disenfranchised from Bush’s New World Order fantasy were still disenfranchised in George W. Bush’s. Fantasy work obscured this fact, allowing the nation to appear homogeneous—until rifts appeared through limit figures like Hurricane Katrina in 2004. The winds in New Orleans—and the televised images of terrified black faces sitting on top of houses waiting for help—blew away the fantasy’s covering of the “others” not contained within the protected Nation. (Pease, *Exceptionalism* 202-03)

Coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina showed the American military using the same weapons one might expect to see in the War on Terror pointed at Americans. Among those impacted by these representations was Barack Obama whose presidential campaign promised change and a uniting of all citizens within the nation. However, as Pease points out in his essay “Obama’s Black Orphic Mysteries,” that change never occurred.
Instead, Obama expanded Bush’s drone program, which justified pre-emptive self-defense in the War on Terror within the recognized “war zones” of Afghanistan and Iraq to execute suspected terrorists. Obama authorized a CIA covert offshoot of the program, escalating strikes in Pakistan, and expanding them to Yemen and Somalia, that has led to the new face of America’s State of Exception: women and children killed by U.S. “terrorism.” (Shane) In 2014, The Guardian reported the statistic by Reprieve, a UK human rights group, that 28 civilians are killed to a single suspected terrorist. The article cites failed attempts to eliminate an Al-Qaeda leader named Ayman Zawahiri resulting in the death of as many as 76 children and 29 adults. (UK human rights).

The “Universal Terrorist” Abroad

As with his father’s fantasy work, George W. Bush and the Homeland Security State fantasy was able to obscure the illegalities of the State of Exception, articulated in the Bush Doctrine which involves what Bush calls “four prongs.” They are: make no distinction between terrorists and the nations that harbor them—and to hold both to account; take the fight to the enemy overseas before they can attack us again here at home; confront threats before they fully materialize; and advance liberty and hope as an alternative to the enemy’s ideology of repression and fear.” (Bush 312) Within this doctrine we see the subtle shift in how violence is condoned in cases of “preeminent” rather than “imminent” threat.

In effect, the U.S. was free to pursue anyone suspected of terrorism anywhere in the world. No longer did the Nation hold the U.S. military accountable to meet the criteria of “imminent danger” that it holds domestically for an individual’s use of lethal force for self-defense. All suspected terrorists are treated in the same way we think of traditional war combatants (Germans or Japanese during World War II.) However, the international community doesn’t agree. In a 2013 report submitted to the U.N. General Assembly, Heyns stressed that signature strikes are “not a concept known to international humanitarian law.” He went on to explain that the standard for attacking a person under the laws of war is whether the person has “a continuous combat
function” or is “directly participating in hostilities.” If a signature strike rests on “targeting without sufficient information to make the necessary determination, it is clearly unlawful.” (Izadi)

According to a New York Times article, the Obama Administration believed intelligence sources could accurately identify armed men involved in plots to attack the United States, although results show how flawed the results can be. “Proliferating mistakes have given drones a sinister reputation in Pakistan and Yemen and have provoked anti-American backlash in the Muslim world. Part of the collateral damage in the strikes has been Mr. Obama’s dream of restoring the United States’ reputation with Muslims around the globe.” It went on to say that “even some former Obama administration security officials have expressed serious doubts about the wisdom on the program, given the ire it has ignited overseas and the terrorists who have said they plotted attacks because of drones.” (Shane)

However, support at home for the program remains high. “Despite the bad reviews overseas, drone strikes remain persistently popular with the American public, with about two-thirds expressing approval in polls. And despite the protests of a few liberal Democrats or libertarian Republicans, they have enjoyed unusual bipartisan support in Congress, where they are viewed as reducing the threat of terrorist attack and keeping American operators out of harm’s way.” (Shane)

President Obama demonstrated the ability to disavowal preemptive violence abroad while at the same time calling for peace and inclusion at home in a speech on Aug. 14, 2014. His purpose was to “update the American people on two issues I’ve been monitoring closely these last several days.” One was justification for military action against ISIL terrorists under the banner of “humanitarian efforts.” The second was a call for peace in Ferguson and fair treatment by the police. He said this of our collective mission: “Let’s remember that we’re all part of one American family. We are united in common values, and that includes belief in equality under the law, basic respect for public order and the right to peaceful public protest, a reverence for the dignity of every single man, woman and child among us, and the need for accountability when it comes to our government.” (Obama)
In the same month as Obama’s speech, the Council on Foreign Relations put the death toll of 500 drone strikes outside of Iraq and Afghanistan at 3,674 people, compared to 2,977 Americans killed on Sept. 11, 2001. This doesn’t include the drone strikes called “signature strikes” that attack people merely based on a pattern of suspicious activity. (Ackerman) In other words, Obama cautioned law enforcement against unjust preemptive strikes against American citizens—because it’s not the American Way—while at the same time playing out the same script against the “other”—human beings rendered “guilty” before a crime was committed.

**Militarization of Domestic Police**

Eric Holder, attorney general, defended targeted drone killings by comparing it to the necessity of police who “prevent escape by using deadly force.” (Singh 1098) Holder isn’t the only one to draw comparisons between the United States’ military and police departments. Numerous media outlets have reported on the militarization of municipal police forces across the country through the distribution of new and used military equipment. This is occurring through a government program and grants from the Department of Homeland Security. The latter is what supplied the Ferguson Police Department with the desert camouflage, body armor and armored vehicles. (Rosenfeld) This outward appearance of domestic police departments, and representations of military-grade assault weapons pointed at Ferguson protestors, reveal a new military logic that has remade police forces in its image.

Both groups—domestic police departments and the U.S. military—share something else in common: the way in which the State of Exception allows justification for actions which Susan Sontag characterized as “the souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done.” When she wrote this, she was referring to the U.S. military guards who took the controversial Abu Ghraib prison photos. She might have been talking about the killing of Michael Brown or the U.S. drone program. (Pease, Exceptionalism, 187)
Conclusion

A concept that appears intertwined in the fabric of American exceptionalism is the belief that America possesses the moral wisdom and insight to be able to justly determine who should live and who should die in order to bring about what Bush articulated in his ideological dream: advance liberty and hope as an alternative to the enemy’s ideology of repression and fear. (Bush, Decision Points) We could say this dream expresses America’s relationship to foreign policy as well as the policing of its own citizens. However, 9/11 succeeded in naturalizing an alternative definition for when it is appropriate to use lethal force for self-defense. The threat need no longer be imminent; now even a potential threat justifies killing—by the U.S. military in countries around the globe, and in our own communities of color.

Until we adhere to a strict definition of legal self-defense as in response to a truly imminent threat, and we act out this value in the war on the “universal terrorist,” Americans will continue to watch the disintegration of its reputation abroad. Most importantly, by dismantling the State of Exception’s illegal use of force abroad, I believe we would see a corresponding response at home, in the streets of our inner cities where black men are not viewed as domestic terrorists, but as equal citizens within the Nation. Perhaps the death of Michael Brown will reveal the limits of the Homeland Security State fantasy, allowing citizens to see that justified killings cannot exist in an America that is truly exceptional.
WORKS CITED


THE STORYTELLER’S DAUGHTER:
HOW MYTH, GENDER, AND ETHNICITY
INFLUENCE IDENTITY FORMATION IN
THE AFGHAN DIASPORA

Mariah Farbotko

Two people live inside me. Like a couple who rarely speak, they are not compatible. My Western side is a sensitive, liberal, middle-class pacifist. My Afghan side I can only describe as a rapacious robber baron. It revels in bloodshed, glories in risk and will not be afraid (Shah 14).

SAIRA SHAH WAS born in Britain into an Afghan family living in diaspora. Despite the English setting of her childhood, she grew up listening to her father’s tales of their mythical homeland of Afghanistan and helping him cook their home country’s traditional pilau in their British kitchen. As Shah grew older, a discontent grew within her as she questioned the authenticity of her father’s myth of Afghanistan, as well as the authenticity of her own Afghan identity. How similar was the real Afghanistan to the one she pictured in her head? How could she consider herself an Afghan if she had never even been to Afghanistan? Eventually her father’s myths of home were no longer enough to sustain her. At the age of twenty-one, Shah set off on a journey of self-discovery that would last decades.

Shah’s travels to Afghanistan were the result of her attempts to separate her diasporic childhood myth from fact and ultimately find her one ‘true’ identity. Throughout my paper I will provide a context for Shah’s experiences both in the diaspora and in her homeland by exploring the history of Afghanistan and its customs and culture, particularly in light of the challenges and
limitations for females. Using Radhakrishnan’s “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” I will argue that Shah’s diasporic identity formation and understanding of her ethnic and national background, as it was passed down from her father and other family members, was context-specific and never stagnant. The sharp contrasts in Shah’s life played a vital yet perplexing role in her identity formation: the clash of norms in her Eastern upbringing in a Western setting, and the startling difference between the mythical utopia of her childhood Afghanistan and the violent, war-torn reality she discovered as an adult. Finally, I will explore how myth, gender, and ethnicity formed Shah’s identity in the diaspora, and conclude that only when Shah found a balance between opposing forces was she able to truly find her own identity, and find peace within herself.

As a child, Shah loved her father’s tales of their magical homeland Afghanistan, particularly the garden in Paghman where her family had had its seat for nine hundred years.

[My father] is telling me of a magical place: the fairytale landscape you enter in your dreams. Fountains fling diamond droplets into mosaic pools. Coloured birds sing in the fruit-laden orchards. The pomegranates burst and their insides are rubies. Fruit is so abundant that even the goats are fed on melons. The water has magical properties: you can fill to bursting with fragrant pilau, then step to the brook and drink – and you will be ready to eat another meal.

On three sides of the plateau majestic mountains tower, capped with snow. The fourth side overlooks a sunny valley where, gleaming far below, sprawls a city of villas and minarets. And here is the best part of the story: it is true (Shah 3).

One of Shah’s favorite childhood activities was planning a trip home to Afghanistan with her siblings and father. (Shah’s mother’s family was from India, but as far as her father was concerned, his children were pure Afghan. Her mother’s background played a very minimal role in Shah’s upbringing.) The trip always seemed to be just around the corner, and when they went, her
father talked of how they would stroll through the gardens of Paghman, visit their old family home, and see long lost relatives. As Shah became a teenager, the trip home began to cause her concern. “How could my father expect us to be truly Afghan when we had grown up outside an Afghan community? When we went back home, wouldn’t we children be strangers, foreigners in our own land?” (Shah 6).

When Shah voiced these anxieties to her father, the answer surprised her, for he explained that he had given her stories to replace a community. He went on to compare stories to “dried experiences,” which are not original experiences but are better than nothing at all.

Experiences follow patterns, which repeat themselves again and again. In our tradition, stories can help you recognize the shape of an experience, to make sense of and to deal with it. So, you see, what you may take for mere snippets of myth and legend encapsulate what you need to know to guide you on your way anywhere among Afghans (Shah 7).

It was then that Shah realized her father had no intention of taking the family to Afghanistan, and she vowed to visit, to experience it for herself, as soon as she was old enough to go. What Shah did not realize in her young age was that her father had left Afghanistan out of necessity, and was trying to protect his family from the wars that had plagued the country for years.

For many individuals in diaspora, the myth of a paradise homeland is enough to maintain a feeling of connection to the homeland and to keep them going day after day, despite the physical distance that separates them. As William Safran states, many individuals in diaspora do not go “home” because their homeland is not a welcoming place for them to return to. “In the meantime, the myth of return serves to solidify ethnic consciousness and solidarity when religion can no longer do so, when the cohesiveness of the local community is loosened, and when the family is threatened with disintegration” (Safran 91). The problem for Shah is that while her father recognized the myth for what it was, Shah grew up believing wholeheartedly that the myth was real, and convinced Afghanistan was just as her father described, a wonderful
paradise she would one day go home to. It was only as she grew older, and found herself suppressing uncomfortable doubts, that she questioned the validity of the myth, in turn causing her to question everything she knew about her Afghan identity.

Contrary to Shah’s belief, the history and formation of Afghanistan as a nation-state was filled with violence and turmoil. Tschanguiz Pahlavan, a leading Iranian political scientist, stated that a nation-state, including the formation of its central authority, can be constituted on the basis of common experiences of the inhabitants. He outlined three main phenomena as ‘nationalizing elements’ – a constitution, war, and migration – all of which will be explored in the context of Afghanistan. “Constitutions are the result of the joint experiences of a people in the form of revolutions, uprisings, or consensus among the various power holders in the countries concerned” (Friedman and Randeria 254). Traditionally in Afghanistan, power structures were founded on a tribal assembly. From the third decade of the twentieth century through the early 2000s, Afghanistan experienced a number of unpopular constitutions approved and issued from the top level. The first was approved by the king, but the kingship was abolished and replaced by a republic, which in turn was replaced again by communists. In 1992, the Mujaheddin allied forces came into power and overthrew the communists from the government. Various ethnic and religious groups participated in the Mujaheddin government, but they were not able to agree on and establish a new constitution. Beginning in 1994, the Taliban forces captured the majority of the country, including the capital, resulting in Afghanistan having two governments until recently (Friedman and Randeria 255).

The many wars throughout Afghanistan’s history have impacted citizens all over the country. While wars are terrible experiences for those involved, they also have the power to build unity among different ethnic and religious communities when they come together to fight for a common cause. These events also have the power to increase attachment to a home country and can lead to an increased sense of national belonging. In the twentieth century, Afghanistan has experienced both internal and external wars. “[T]he Jihad (Holy War) against the presence of Russian military forces was the first comprehensive national movement in the history of the country” (Friedman
and Randeria 257). Afghanistan’s citizens were able to unite around a common objective and against a common enemy. Unfortunately, when the Mujaheddin later came into power, the roots of ethnic and religious hostilities resurfaced. With the lack of a foreign enemy to unite citizens together, civil war erupted, with a number of conflicting groups trying to secure a share for themselves in the formation of a new power structure (Friedman and Randeria 258).

The events that occurred in Afghanistan during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in large population losses, as well as migrations and displacements. “According to UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] reports, during the Soviet-Afghanistan war, more than 1.2 million Afghans perished, 300,000 were crippled for life, almost six million became refugees, while approximately two to three million were internally displaced as a result of fighting” (Friedman and Randeria 270). The transnationally displaced groups formed diasporas faced with the challenge of both preserving their national identity and way of life, while also assimilating to new surroundings in a host country. Many factors can influence life for minorities in a diaspora, including the homeland’s economic, cultural, and political situation.

Shah’s father’s preservation of his family’s national identity through stories, food, and customs is a familiar practice for many individuals living outside their home country, and refers to what social scientists in the field of migration studies call transnationalism. “[Transnationalism] broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 141). One challenge that arises is that while all Afghans living in diaspora can be considered transnational and many do share certain similarities, it is important to note that a diaspora is not a homogenous community with one set of goals and practices. Individuals’ views and opinions are likely affected by situations and experiences before and during exile. The location of the diaspora can also be significant, with opinions of Afghans in the wider diaspora (Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand) varying greatly from those in the near diaspora (Pakistan, Iran, India, and Central Asia) (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 143).

Shah grew up in a diasporic community in Britain, a country with Western values located geographically far from Afghanistan, which was a crucial factor in her identity formation and allowed her opportunities she would
not have received had she been raised in her father’s home country. While there have been improvements in recent years in the fight for women’s human rights in Afghanistan, the overall situation for many remains grim. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women is a grave issue at the household, community, and state levels in Afghanistan. “[As of 2008,] an estimated 87 percent of women are affected by domestic violence, at least 60 percent of all marriages are forced in Afghanistan, and 57 percent of girls are married before the age of sixteen (some are as young as six)” (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 48). In many cases, these forced marriages occur between young girls and men who are significantly older than them, leading to high rates of sexual abuse. In addition, women and girls are regularly exchanged in marriage as compensation for debts or to resolve disputes between tribes. Polygamy is also very common, as there are no laws requiring court permission for marriages beyond the first (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 49).

Women in Afghanistan also face severe restrictions in their civil and political rights. Civil society can be understood as a public realm where citizens collectively express ideas and exchange information, and the nature of civil society “has been directly correlated with good governance, well-established democratic processes and a healthy economy (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 49). As such, effective civil society is particularly important in Afghanistan, and it is crucial that women are given the opportunities and capacities to be involved in the process. Sadly, most women do not have access to the public spaces necessary to take part in political, civil, and social life. Notions of honor promote women’s seclusion, while lack of identification documents and high female illiteracy rates deny women’s social mobility. Additionally, the few women who do hold prominent roles in public life run the risk of threats, intimidations, and death (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 51).

Major health issues are also a widespread problem for women in Afghanistan. Many women and girls lack access to basic healthcare, resulting in the average female life expectancy of only forty-four years. Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world, but almost forty percent of deaths due to pregnancy complications are preventable with proper healthcare access. In some instances, women are unable to seek medical care due to a lack of female doctors, or because their husbands forbid them from
doing so. Sexual violence against women in Afghanistan is also a very real threat which can result in not only physical injuries and disease, but psychological damage and social ostracism as well.

Women in Afghanistan have extremely limited judicial protection, resulting in a culture where women who have been sexually assaulted are discouraged and even punished for reporting the incident to authorities. “Authorities rarely investigate women’s complaints of violent attacks or rape; and murder or suicides of women and ‘honour’ crimes are rarely reported. Even if these crimes are brought to court, offenders are rarely prosecuted” (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 51). Women who report rape face serious risks themselves, such as imprisonment or being tried for crimes of sexual intercourse outside the marriage. If incarcerated, these women face significant difficulties reintegrating back into Afghan society (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 51).

Poor social and economic status also plagues women in Afghanistan, as gender discrimination runs rampant throughout the country. Many families live in poverty and struggle to provide basic school supplies, especially for young girls, and girls forced into early marriage often abruptly end their education as a result. Women are largely dependent on men for their survival, and if they are able to find work, they generally earn only a third of what men earn. This economic dependency limits women’s ability to provide for themselves and forces them to rely on their husbands. The conflicts in Afghanistan have also resulted in approximately one million widows across the country who have been denied inheritance rights and are left unable to provide for their families (Oeppen and Schlenkhoff 52).

Growing up in Britain, Shah was ignorant of the many issues plaguing women in Afghanistan. As a child, listening to her father’s stories of brave Afghan warriors, it would not occur to her until years later that only men were featured in the heroic tales of her homeland. Shah’s father was a storyteller, as only men were allowed to do, and as life took her away from the myths into the reality of her own experiences, the truth of women’s place in Afghan society became startlingly clear to her.

Shah’s first experience with her extended Afghan family occurred at her cousin’s wedding when she was seventeen years old, and it gave her a glimpse into the larger Afghan community she was desperate to be a part of.
“For the first time in my life I was nufus-dar, the Afghan term that means literally ‘having people’ – but which conveys a sense of safety and belonging. I had found my tribe” (Shah 47). Shah’s extended family lived in a diasporic community in Pakistan. Not long after meeting them, she learned that the difference in their proximities to Afghanistan played an important role in their family norms. Shah’s uncle, Mirza, lamented the fact that his son was marrying outside the family, and explained to Shah that if the marriage had not already been arranged with the bride’s family, he would have preferred to have his son marry her instead. “In the sight of Allah, the most blessed form of marriage is between first cousins” (Shah 48).

The wedding celebrations lasted for fourteen days and nights, culminating in a reception. While the groom was free of restrictions, and permitted to laugh and chat with guests, the bride was required to sit perfectly still with her eyes lowered to the ground for the duration of the reception. Shah knew in this moment that she could never play the role of a submissive Afghan bride. “For the first time in my life, I found myself wishing I’d been born a boy” (Shah 58). This marked a turning point for her as she began to understand first-hand the limitations placed on women in Afghanistan, and how removed she had been from that growing up in the diaspora.

As an adult, Shah travels to Afghanistan on several separate occasions, and the oppression of the women she meets there is a recurring theme through her memoir. Early on in her writing, Shah describes in detail the sensation of choking under her burqa, the outer garment women are required to wear that covers their face, body, arms, and legs. Shah compares it to looking out through prison bars, and describes how it restricts her vision and makes it difficult to breathe. She does not dare lift even the front flap, as this is a crime punishable by beating.

Three women and three young girls made profound impacts on Shah during her travels in Afghanistan, as she recognized how starkly their lives contrasted her own. The first was the wife of Zahir Shah, who was never referred to by name but only as Zahir’s wife. Zahir was the ruler of a mountain fortress in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, and he helped illegally escort Shah into Afghanistan on her first trip in 1986. Shah stayed with Zahir and his wife for several days as they made preparations to begin their journey.
On one of Shah’s first days there, Zahir proudly proclaimed to Shah, in front of his wife, that he has ten children. “Every one is a blessing from Allah. And, if Allah wills, this one will bear me twenty more” (Shah 76). After Zahir left the room, his wife turned to Shah and asked her about a magic pill she heard about that is available in the West and can stop you from getting pregnant. She desperately wanted to stop having children, and asked Shah if she could get the pill for her without telling her husband. Shah wanted to help, but thought through the logistics and realized she was not likely to come back there after her journey, there was no doctor nearby for miles, and worried that if Zahir found out, his wife would face a terrible wrath. “If he discovered what she was doing, she would be shamed, divorced; possibly even – in this place of reputation, honour and tribal law – killed” (Shah 77). Shah thought the kindest response would be to lie, so she told the wife she was not sure such a pill even existed. The wife’s mother overheard the exchange, and was relieved by Shah’s response. She stated that now her daughter could continue to remain at home and bear many sons, which is what Allah has ordained for women (Shah 77).

Further along her first journey to Afghanistan, Shah came upon a remote village town where she intended to stay for the evening. As is customary, she first needed to visit the local Khan, the village headman, to pay her respects. The Khan showed her to the women’s quarters and introduced her to his two wives, Fatima and Salma. Fatima was the younger wife, likely in her early twenties, and already had three or four small children. The Khan introduced Fatima as “very good – she breeds a lot” (Shah 91). When pointing to his older wife, the Khan explained “Salma is not so good. She doesn’t bear children any more. Mind you, she has borne me seven children already. So she, too, was good once” (Shah 91). Shah felt angry and indignant on Salma’s behalf, but was surprised as Salma nodded and smiled through the exchange (Shah 91).

In that same village, Shah had a very different experience when meeting the wife of Hashem, the local apothecary. Her name was Karima, she was exceedingly beautiful, and it was obvious to Shah that Karima and Hashem were deeply in love. “[T]wo souls perfectly matched, their bond sealed with a trust and mutual respect that is rare anywhere in the world” (Shah 95). Shah felt an inexplicable affinity for Karima at first meeting, and despite the many
differences in their lives, they got along splendidly and spoke for hours. Karima had spent her entire life in the same remote mountain village, and was filled with questions for Shah of her life on the outside.

Shah realized that just as she had traveled to Afghanistan to chase her father’s fairytales, in listening to Shah’s tales of life in the West, the West had become that fairytale for Karima. As Shah spoke of the outside world, it only highlighted the narrowness of existence in her valley. Karima told Shah she hoped to one day leave the village, but Shah hoped she never did, for she knew she would never be able to return to the serene existence she knew before. “If she came with me, her experience would change her forever, and bar her from this world” (Shah 95). Years after leaving that village, Shah continued to think of Karima and Hashem, and the quiet, peaceful life they were living in parallel to hers, “too remote to be touched by either time or war” (Shah 95).

Fifteen years after her initial visit, Shah returned to Afghanistan with a documentary film crew to investigate rumors that the Taliban in Nawabad (northern Afghanistan) had massacred people from different ethnic groups. During her journey she came upon a house in a village with three girls in the courtyard ages fifteen, twelve, and nine. “As we stepped into the courtyard, we knew that something bad had happened there. We all felt it” (Shah 214). One girl was facing a wall, rocking back and forth silently. Another girl was frozen in a similar position, and the two did not try to comfort each other. Only the third girl, the eldest, spoke to Shah and her team, explaining what had happened when the Taliban came to their home several weeks prior.

The Taliban came to the house when the girls’ father was away and declared they would make the house their headquarters. The Taliban ordered the girls and their mother to leave, but it was snowing, and when the mother questioned where they should go, she was shot and killed on the spot. The Taliban had stayed with the girls in the house for two days. When asked what the soldiers had done to them during that time, the two younger girls merely cried, while the eldest replied, “They asked for food and water. What could we do? Our mother was dead. We had to do whatever they told us” (Shah 215).

Shah’s interactions with the women and girls she met in Afghanistan impacted her for the rest of her life. Each visit reinforced the gift her father had bestowed upon her – the opportunity to grow up safely in the diaspora,
knowing the best parts of the Afghan community without actually having to live a life of hardship and oppression as a woman in Afghanistan. Knowing the benefits of her diasporic childhood also gave Shah a sense of immense guilt towards the women she encountered whose lives were so much less fortunate than hers. However, in an ironic way, Shah also fiercely envied these women and their claim of pure Afghan-ness, something she would never be able to achieve, no matter how many times she visited. With each return to her life in the West, no matter the atrocities she had witnessed or the dangers she had experienced, Shah felt the pull of Afghanistan, and the lure of her next trip in the seemingly unending quest to find her true identity.

Shah’s father played a vital role in her identity formation, and his insistence that his children have an “authentic” Afghan upbringing was an integral part of her childhood in the diaspora. This concept of authenticity is often central for those living in diaspora, and is explored further in R. Radhakrishnan’s essay, “Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora,” which focuses on immigrants from India living in the United States. Radhakrishnan uses a series of questions and personal examples to explore how different generations living together in diaspora can understand their ethnic backgrounds and identities. His essay begins with a question posed by his eleven-year-old son, “Am I Indian or American?” From this, Radhakrishnan infers a host of implied questions about ethnicity.

How could someone be both one and something other? How could the unity of identity have more than one face or name? If my son is both Indian and American, which one is he really? Which is the real self and which the other? How do these two selves coexist and how do they weld into one identity? How is ethnic identity related to national identity? (Radhakrishnan 120).

Using the main concepts Radhakrishnan outlines in his essay, one can contrast Radhakrishnan’s relationship with his son to Shah’s father’s relationship with his daughter in *The Storyteller’s Daughter*. In response to his son’s initial question, Radhakrishnan tells his son that he is both Indian and American, and responds with what he refers to as the two kinds of authority as a parent:
“the authority of a parent to transmit and sustain a certain pattern generationally and the authority of a teacher based on knowledge and information” (122). After answering his son confidently, Radhakrishnan begins to question his own authority on the subject and how he came upon the knowledge to provide such a response. Radhakrishnan then points out a different example contradicting his initial response, where he spoke with American citizen children of Indian ethnicity in the diaspora who reported feeling exclusively Indian; these children felt ‘othered’ by their American peers because of their skin color, family background, and other unassimilated traits. While the children’s parents were upset by this type of behavior towards their children, they could not fully grasp the children’s situation, having not gone through similar experiences in their own childhoods.

This type of generational disconnect is a main focus in Radhakrishnan’s essay. He suggests that each generation understand and appreciate the other’s experiences, especially as the problems in the diaspora are often more complex than just the commonly thought of generational gap. “The tensions between the old and new homes create the problem of divided allegiances that the two generations experience differently” (123). Displaced families are forces to create new norms and patterns for themselves while taking into account multiple outside influences. The older generations in these families are presented with the issue of how to retain their identity and the customs and cultures of their homeland while assimilating to a new environment. The children living in diaspora are faced with different challenges, particularly feeling pressure from older generations to identify with a homeland they do not know, while also seeking to fit in with their American peers. Radhakrishnan also touches on the generational differences between levels of emotional commitment to the home country, emphasizing the distinction between knowing about a home country (younger generations) and having an emotional investment in a home country (older generations). “It would be foolish of me to expect that India will move my son the same way it moves me” (125).

Radhakrishnan determines that understandings of ethnicity are not fixed or stable, but are context specific and subject to time and place. He uses the example of multiple generations of Indians living together in diaspora to exemplify this idea, questioning the extent to which the home country impacts
identities within the diaspora. Radhakrishnan also points out the difference between “Indian” and “Indian-American,” noting “when people move, identities, perspectives, and definitions change” (123). He describes being Indian in the home country of India as something safe, secure, and definite, whereas in America, the “Indian” in Indian-American takes on a quality of marginalization and otherness.

In Radhakrishnan’s conclusion, he demonstrates how the diaspora can positively impact one’s identity, noting the individual has a choice to proactively engage in the possibilities and understanding of different histories available there. He also strongly cautions against the desire for one authentic, ideal form of identity as it can often lead to essentialism, reducing identity to one factor alone. Circling back to his son’s question of his own identity, Radhakrishnan states, “I hope that his future and that of his generation will have many roots and many pasts. I hope, especially, that it will be a future where his identity will be a matter of rich and complex negotiation and not the result of some blind decree” (129).

Unlike Radhakrishnan’s claim to his son that he is both Indian and American, Shah’s father made it clear from birth that she was to consider herself pure Afghan. While Shah does not explicitly provide an explanation for her father’s behavior, one can infer that his stories and myths were a way of keeping the memory of his home country alive through his children. Aside from the pleasure in reminiscing about his homeland, Shah’s father also offered his children myths of Afghanistan to help them, and him, survive life in the diaspora. They were refugees living in a foreign land, but the myths of their utopian home allowed them to be proud of where they came from and hold their heads high when harassed by local children.

Time has caught up at last with my family. I am no longer alone. Four million Afghan refugees have been exiled from their homes for two decades. A whole generation has grown up outside Afghanistan. They have never lost their Afghan identity, because they have never been offered another in its place. They have learned, through bitter experience, the value of a myth (Shah 26).

Shaw grew up believing in her father’s tales and feeling intensely connected to Afghanistan through his stories, contradicting Radhakrishnan’s claims that younger generations lack emotional connections to their home-
lands. While Radhakrishnan claimed it would be foolish to expect his son to be as moved by India as he was, Shah was fiercely moved by Afghanistan, almost more so than her father. A childhood spent dreaming of a paradise Afghanistan made Shah long to discover the country for herself, draw out the truths from her father’s myths, and finally find her authentic Afghan identity.

Shah spent decades attempting to separate the myth from fact in the Afghan identity her father bestowed upon her.

[I] need to know what is fact and what is fairytale more than I need the reassurance of the myth. Only truth can answer the questions that for years I haven’t even dared to ask my own heart. Does the Afghanistan of our myths really exist? Are we still Afghans? And if I am not Afghan, what am I? (Shah 43).

On her quest for truth, during one of her trips to Afghanistan, Shah visited Paghman, the magical gardens central to all of her father’s stories. Paghman was the very core of her Afghan sense of self, and Shah knew that seeing the garden in all its glory would be all the confirmation she needed that her father was correct and the myth was real. A tiny part of her worried though, if the garden was not what she had hoped for all these years, that a part of her would be a lie too (Shah 43).

Upon entering Paghman, Shah’s heart fell, for it was a desolate plateau: the soil was infertile, the trees had been cut down, the fountains were dry, and the ground was strewn with mines and debris. She recalled the poet Sa’adi her father spoke of, who had once gazed upon a rose garden and knew its beauty would fade. Sa’adi cautioned against becoming attached to what would not endure, and instead built his own version of a rose garden in his work and stories which would survive for centuries. As Shah thought of Sa’adi, she glanced up at the mountains and down into the valley where Kabul “[lay] like a jewel at [her] feet” (Shah 44). She knew this was an illusion, for the city was war-torn and shattered, but because of her father’s myths, she could see the splendor beyond the ruins (Shah 44).

With each journey to Afghanistan, Shah sought out the truth behind her father’s myths. While outwardly searching for facts and reality, she inwardly
kept hope alive that the fairytale existed. Each myth proven false spurred Shah to plan another trip, where she hoped this time the myth could be found alive. Shah wrestled with her “incompatible worlds of East and West” all her life, and she convinced herself that finding the myth of Afghanistan, and being in Afghanistan, held the key to unlocking her identity (Shah 79).

Shah would become an adult before she realized the myths for what they actually were, stories and life lessons passed down from generation to generation. One could find hidden meanings among the tales, but no hard truth that could be traced back to physical locations in Afghanistan. By passing the myths down to Shah, her father had meant to transfer his homeland knowledge, pride, and sense of Afghan identity. Instead, he unknowingly radically complicated her sense of self by eliminating the whole Western piece of her identity. Shah grew up utterly confused well into adulthood, wanting to please her father by being ‘pure Afghan,’ but unsure of what that meant or how she could accomplish it. “To this day, I dreaded the question, ‘Where are you from?’ Why did it matter to me that I could never answer in just one word? I had always longed to belong to a single place: why couldn’t that place be the West?” (Shah 221).

Radhakrishnan cautioned against the desire for one true or authentic identity, as it can limit identity to only one defining factor. Shah’s father based his identity solely on his Afghani ethnicity, failing to take into account the repercussions of passing on this essentialist view to his children. The concept of having only one true identity plagued Shah throughout her entire life. As a child, she grew up unable to embrace her Western side for fear of failing her father, and consequently failing Afghanistan itself. As an adult, she traveled to dangerous places in Afghanistan, putting herself in harm’s way on numerous occasions, all in the name of her search for identity.

Shah’s father was a hugely influential figure throughout her life. As a result, she often sought approval from not only him, but others she came across in her journeys who also embodied her idealized, mythical Afghanistan. One such figure was professor Majrooh, an internationally acclaimed scholar whom she befriended while living as a journalist in Peshawar in the late 1980s. Shah saw him as a mentor and “perhaps another storyteller father figure to replace the one [she] had left in England” (Shah 112). Shah grew quite fond of
professor Majrooh, and placed her hopes in the chance that he could unlock the myth she was chasing. When professor Majrooh was murdered at his front door one day, Shah was subsequently consumed with grief.

*I had lost much more than a friend, a mentor, a father figure: for me, the professor was the human being I had picked to personify the fairytale Afghanistan in which I had so desperately wanted to believe. His murder was the final blow that marked the death of my own personal myth* (Shah 185).

The death of professor Majrooh forced Shah to reconcile the lost Afghanistan she was chasing with the reality of the Afghanistan she had faced time and again. She reflected back on a conversation she had with her father before her first trip to Afghanistan, where she told him of her grand plans to find the truth about their homeland and verify his myths once and for all. Shah’s father merely listened, then patiently stated, “You need to learn how to compromise[,] Otherwise you’ll get yourself killed” (Shah 207). Shah had not fully comprehended her father’s statement until many years later, when she realized that by chasing her father’s dreams, she had actually banished them (Shah 207). Her father knew what the outcome of Shah’s journeys would reveal, but he also knew he could not stop her. Despite Shah’s father’s persistent claims of pure Afghan-ness, he was more influenced by his Western surroundings than he cared to admit. He had raised Shah to be a strong, independent, educated woman, a sharp contrast to the upbringing of many young women in Afghanistan. He knew Shah would visit Afghanistan for herself, regardless of the risks, to satisfy her unending quest for identity.

Several months after meeting the three young girls in the courtyard whose mother had been killed by the Taliban, Shah traveled back into Afghanistan in an effort to find them. In Shah’s mind, if she could save the three girls, it would somehow make up for all of the other losses she had experienced, and perhaps even rekindle a small part of her father’s Afghanistan myth. Unfortunately, she was unsuccessful. She had hoped the girls could be educated, for that was their best chance for a successful future, but the closest school was a thirty-minute drive away, and the family did not have access to a car.
The girl’s father was also opposed to their education, as he himself was not an educated man. The girls’ father finally told Shah that with his wife dead, he needed the girls at home to do housework, ending the conversation and any chance Shah had for saving them (Shah 245).

Shah left the girls’ house feeling let down by their father and disappointed in the country she loved. The next morning she left Afghanistan for the last time. Crossing the border, a patrol officer took Shah’s passport and, recognizing her name, asked if she was from Afghanistan. Shah replied that her father was but added severely, “[I] am from Britain. I am from the West” (Shah 250). She stepped on a pontoon boat and as it drifted away from shore, she heard the patrol officer say, “She may look like a feranghee, a foreigner, but her father is from Paghman[.] She is one of us. She is an Afghan” (Shah 251).

Shah is the embodiment of Radhakrishnan’s view that understandings of ethnicity are always changing, context specific, and subject to place and time. Shah spent decades searching for her one true Afghan identity, the identity that fit with her father’s teachings and myths, before finally realizing she did not need to have just one identity at all. She carried the influence of myth, gender, and ethnicity with her throughout her entire life and came to appreciate the unique factors each contributed to her identity. Because of her diasporic upbringing, Shah could be both East and West, and over time she learned that these opposing forces could blend together and complement each other rather than clash. Shah may never have found the mythical Afghanistan she searched for, but her journeys allowed her to find the true meaning behind her father’s stories, and ultimately to find herself in the process.
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THE BRANDING AND COMMODIFICATION OF ART AND ITS RELATION TO CULTURAL THEORY

Kaitlin Serota

FOR 34,000 YEARS, since early humans represented their lives in cave drawings, the function of art has been continuously evolving. Art history is the discourse in which scholars can study the use of art and select which art has meaning; cultural studies is the discourse in which scholars can analyze that historical process. Many theories within cultural studies are pertinent to analyzing the art historian’s role in assessing the cultural value of art. However, since the emergence of branding and commodification it has become essential to reconsider existing theories of art’s function. Specifically, looking at the concepts of branding and commodification as processes that complicate the uses of art. Branding is the practice of connecting ideas to objects to generate monetary value. Commodification is the application of value to an object; in terms of art, it is often its mass duplication. This paper aims to reconsider existing theories of art valuation, as it relates to how branding and commodification operate. This paper will address the cultural theories of Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin.

To grasp the relationship between cultural studies theory and art historical theory one should look to the contributions of highly influential scholars in each respective field. Raymond Williams, a pioneer in Cultural Studies throughout the twentieth-century, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Williams’ antecedent from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth-century, whose work marks the emergence of the modern form of art history. Focusing on the excerpt The Analysis of Culture in Williams’ The Long Revolution, published in 1961. In this section, Williams outlines a method of analysis that can be used to understand how art operates within the ‘selective tradition,’
the narrowing of selected objects that embody a cultural period. With each new generation of scholars, the continued study of past cultural periods only further refines and reconfigures pieces of art within that canon. As long as cultural analysis is taking place, the selective tradition is continuously evolving. Williams notes that this ever-refining selective tradition is what ultimately serves as a contribution to the growth to the collective culture of humanity.

To obtain a complete understanding of any artwork, we must first consider two theories. Firstly, that there may not be universal conditions of seeing, and secondly, that art created in different cultural periods requires varying methods of analysis. One of the earliest methods of art historical theory took the form of surveying art to determine its high and low points based on an established ideal. However, in Williams’ assessment of the growth of human culture, art’s value cannot be judged with the belief that we have an already known ideal that should (and can) be achieved. Williams’ theory on the analysis of culture is in line with the work of Hegel, who ushered in our modern form of art history. Hegel’s theory of Aesthetics positions the meaning of art in relation to its historical location, creating the outline for understanding and studying the historical development of art. Hegel expresses the concept of art’s connection to the lived experience in which it was created, stating, “it is the vocation of art to find for the spirit of a people the artistic expression corresponding to it.”

It was from here that the major works after Hegel, many of which were in response to issues they found within his work, laid the foundation for our modern form of theory in art history. This also demonstrates how a critical response to inadequacies found therein propels scholarly progress. Art history, like cultural studies, requires an interdisciplinary approach.

Williams continues to use this relationship between art and culture as a means to interpret their impact on other aspects of society. He designates two distinct categories of tradition: that which is selected by those who lived within that culture and that which is selected after those who lived the culture are gone. Williams presumes that art will only become a part of the selective tradition if it can transcend the culture in which it was created or acts as the closest representation of the lived experience. However, the process of brand-
ing art presents a problem to that approach. Branding uses established notions of value and applies them to objects to create a perception of worth and value. In our current capitalist society, we often judge the value of objects based on their monetary worth. Thus, much of contemporary art is considered significant based on the high monetary value it commands, which is indivisible with the branding of both the art and the artist.

Various methods of art branding have existed throughout history. However, current branding practices are unique in their market-driven actions. Art no longer enters the canon based upon its ability to transcend the culture it was created in; it is being deemed important because professionals within the art industry have placed value—in the form of a price tag—up on it to make a profit. We have now entered an era where monetary value is indistinguishable from cultural value.

The branding of art bypasses essential cultural barriers, which have evolved precisely as a way of refining and narrowing which objects are determined valuable. In Williams’s theory, art would gain its monetary value based on its cultural value. With this new market-driven process of branding, it is the opposite, and furthermore it is being chosen to be a part of collective human culture because of it. Large portions of our culture are being determined by capitalistic ambitions and greed.

Art, culture, and branding collide continuously throughout history, as outlined by Pierre Bourdieu in the chapter “The Aristocracy of Culture” in his book Distinction, published in 1979. In this text, Bourdieu considers the seeing and reading of a work of art as an act of deciphering a set of codes. Bourdieu states, “[a] work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.” From an art historical standpoint, this act of seeing and reading a work of art is separated into two categories, aesthetics and theory. “Aesthetics looks at the universal features of the perception of art” and “[theory] focuses on historically and culturally specific ways of seeing.” In Bourdieu’s understanding of written art history, language is used to enforce class hierarchies. It is in this way that branding works in favor of hegemonic forces. The language of art history and criticism provides the foundation for branding to build on. Bour-
dieu classifies it as a part of a ‘linguistic market’ that has three functions: “to redistribute capital within an artistic field through agents’ strategies, continually reestablish an orthodoxy in a field whose logic encourages heterodoxy, and express and reproduce class hierarchy.”

The artists themselves, art critics, gallery owners, auction house professionals, and even the bourgeoisie can carry out the act of branding, so long as the branding is then accepted by the bourgeoisie in the form of a purchase. Once the art is purchased, the price it was paid for is considered its fixed worth and is quite stable. By assigning the value to this object, the bourgeoisie is asserting its power as a class. The process of commodification and reproduction is thus initiated and sustained. Since the work of art is branded with the approval of the bourgeoisie, it may be reproduced in other forms. This can be most readily seen in museum gift shops when an artwork is pasted onto coffee cups, calendars, and fridge magnets. Thus, the act and acceptance of branding is a way to maximize, sustain, and strengthen profits and power.

Bourdieu divides capital into three categories: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. He defines economic capital as financial wealth, cultural capital as the possession of representative forms of valued culture, and social capital as the network of personal relations. For Bourdieu, the purchasing of an original work of art is taking economic capital and transferring it into cultural and social capital. Meaning, that the cultural and social capital of the art buyer increases. The process of branding art further facilitates the purchasing of art for the purpose of gaining cultural and social capital.

The rise of conceptual art can be seen as a cause for the increase in the commodification of art. This is partly due to conceptual art’s dependence on branding. The artistic movement of conceptualism has “helped engender the conditions underlying the next wave of market expansion.” This newest wave of market expansion is the total commodification of art. It can be argued that this change was positive, that the mechanical reproduction of art has allowed people within the middle class to own and experience art like never before (although Bourdieu’s theory on museum accessibility still holds true for those in the lower or uneducated classes). Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, both German Jewish intellectual thinkers of the Frankfurt School of thought, argue that this change in art has resulted in an ominous mass culture. In their
seminal work, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, they delineate the tension within the populace between the elite and the masses. The elite dictate culture and the rest are coerced to follow. They disregard the Hegelian view art’s role in society; now it merely functions as an instrument in the toolbox that builds the social hierarchy. This understanding of the way art operates in relation to social classes is similar to Bourdieu’s. For Adorno and Horkheimer the art production system created by the systematic manipulation of branding and commodification exists under what they call ‘the culture industry.’

The branding and commodification of art is the materialization of their theory of ‘standardization’ and ‘pseudo individuality.’ Standardization is the core of technological rationality that is designed to strip culture of the qualities of authentic creativity, it is culture created with the forethought of its mass marketability. Pseudo individuality is the production of pseudo individuals, the act of designating contemporary artists as unique and a representation of free choice when in reality they are pawns of the mass cultural market. It is in this way that standardization and pseudo-individuation exist as traits that inherently compose the system that branding and commodification have created.

Adorno and Horkheimer consider the stylistic periods of Romanticism and Expressionism as examples of freethinking that is no longer produced due to mass culture. Does the act of mass marketing historic works nullify their cultural value? The act of branding and commodification of art has forced the value of culture to depend on its designated monetary value.

It is in Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of production and consumption of art that branding and commodification continuously manipulate the masses into tiers of controllable consumers. If high-valued art is intrinsically part of the upper class, than the accessible reproductions of art allows lower classes to obtain markers of class, rather than “class” itself. However, the purchasing of this reproduced object only further enforces the dominance of the elite and the barrier between them and the non-elite. One either owns the art, or a mass reproduction; the very item that allows a consumer to identify with the upper class is the signifier that they are not of that social tier; “[t]he culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.”
While this paper has analyzed the issues of the branding and commodification of art, there is an additional aspect that requires one’s attention: the technological reproduction of art. Walter Benjamin introduces his theory on this subject in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproduction.* Writing on the theory of reproducibility Benjamin sees art’s value being lost in the process of reproduction. He believes the uniqueness of original works of art lie in their authenticity and aura, which he claims is lost in the process of technological reproduction. Benjamin believes that an original work of art contains a unique aura that cannot be reproduced.

Benjamin conceives human perception as a process that has evolved over time. Changes in social structure have highly influenced people’s perspectives. He detects the most recent change in perspective as deriving from the commodification of art. This has fostered transformation of perception from contemplation to distraction. He sees this transformation as being propelled by the masses who merely seek distraction, as distraction promotes the absence of thinking, which contemplation demands.

Benjamin’s comment, “quantity has been transformed into quality[,]” refers to the idea that the more a work of art is reproduced, the higher quality it must be. In other words, the massification denotes its popularity and therefore endows its high cultural quality. Benjamin views the technological reproduction of art as drastically influencing the intentions behind why art is produced. Since reproduction nullifies the authority of authenticity it no longer aims to embody its effect. Benjamin surmises, “as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized.” This revolution takes the form of productional change. In other words, the intention and inspiration of the artist is altered to fit the needs of creating art that can be successfully reproduced. Benjamin notes, “[t]o an ever-increasing degree, the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility.” Therefore, it can be said that the branding and commodification of art adds another layer of corrupted intentions behind the making of art, and thus also “changes the relation of the masses to art.”
In consideration of Benjamin’s theory on reproducibility, the branding and commodification of art result in a further loss of art’s authenticity and aura: “[b]y replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence.”29 By branding art, one not only strips away the aura that was organically existent in the original, but also superficially imposes a false aura in the effort to commodify it. It could be surmised that Benjamin believes that these processes ultimately degrade the true cultural value of art, especially when applied to art made before these processes emerged.

Using the multiple frameworks presented in this paper, the branding and commodification of art uses monetary means as a way of designating value. This enables the elite to bestow value upon any art object they choose. They are essentially creating their own hierarchical system of value, and subsequently culture. Monetary motivation is dictating the composition of art like never before. As long as monetary means dictates the scale in which we value cultural objects, art will continue to be made in relation to that value system. This can mean that art is a false representation of our lived experience, that art is no longer the ideal mode of realistic representation. Or, it can be seen as a bleak but accurate representation of the hold that capitalism has on our society, correctly showing the detrimental effects it has imposed.

Since this process is already in action, how can it be reworked? It seems that it would take vast and drastic shifts in our collective thinking in order to move away from a global capitalist market. And without shifting from a capitalist market, it is unlikely that current art practices would change. Is the art industry powerless to change this? Art experts and critics can be seen as aiders and abettors at the core of this process. This occurs when art industry professionals who profit off the selling of art, designate unwarranted prestige to artwork to generate a sale. Do art historians have an obligation to disrupt this flawed cultural machine? If they were to do so, it would have to be in the form of theory that could lead to a thought and cultural revolution.
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ON A RAINY DAY in mid-August 1945, Noriko Suzuki, a 15-year-old Japanese girl fled with 600 other Japanese who were initially sent by the Japanese government to settle in northeastern China. Their original plan was to return Japan through a Japanese refugee camp. Under the attack of the Soviet Union’s military forces and armed local people, this group of Japanese refugees trudged through many dead bodies. Suzuki, the 15-year-old girl, was abducted by a soldier and then rescued by a local farmer. Eventually, she was adopted by an old man and got married to his son when growing up into an adult, with whom she had five children. Considering her family in China, she turned down a chance of returning to Japan in the 1950s. However, this didn’t mean her longing for homeland was diminished. Another 20 years passed before she had a chance to make connections with family members in Japan—a brother who had stayed in Japan and a sister who returned earlier. In 1978, she decided to move back to Japan with her whole family and lived as a dressmaker and cleaning woman until her retirement in 1990. Along with many other war orphans, she filed lawsuits against the Japanese government for its failure to expeditiously repatriate and successfully resettle the war orphans (Akemi Nakamura 2007).

Suzuki is a war orphan, because her parents were dead and she was raised by Chinese people. Japan’s war orphans are people of Japanese parentage who as infants or young children were separated from their families in the WWII-era and raised by Chinese families (Efird 2008, 364). Many small children were orphaned when their parents were killed, taken away by the army, lost at retreat, or were simply given away by their parents with a hope for their better survival (Tseng et 330; Efird 2010:810). There are several characteristics
of war orphans: they were born of Japanese parentage; they were left in China and separated from original families at Japan’s capitulation; they were adopted by Chinese families and remained in China ever since (Asano 3). However, in 1945, the Japanese government defined a war orphan as under thirteen at the retreat. This excluded stranded women over thirteen, including wives of soldiers, daughters of immigrants and bride candidates, who got no assistance from the Japanese government in their repatriations.

As victims of a specific time and war, they have struggled with longing and belonging for their whole lives, growing up in China, behaving indistinguishably as Chinese people during the process, then moving back to Japan, encountering financial and cultural obstacles. Many of them were bullied in China for being Japanese but also discriminated against for being ‘Chinese’ back in Japan, even after gaining back the Japanese nationalities. So where is home for a war orphan? How do they define their ethnicities? This paper includes narrative stories about war orphans and their various sense of longing and belonging, including stories from newspapers and a Chinese novel called ‘Auntie Duohe’ about a war orphan.

**History and Policy**

On August 25, 1936, the Japanese government made a migration plan for about one million households, approximately five million people, to Manchuria, Japan’s puppet regime in Northeastern China, starting from 1937. To further enhance its military power in that area, the government enlisted young adults and teenagers above 14 years as the *Patriotic Youth Brigade*, whose number reached 385,000 until 1945. About one million young girls who were called ‘bride candidates’ were also sent to this area. The total number reached 1.55 million, including 270,000 farmers—a policy in terms of providing back-up materials for the front-line army and setting up a buffer zone in northern Manchuria against imminent Soviet attacks.

However, those immigrants were victims of government propaganda which pictured the prosperity in Manchuria, and the friendship between Japanese and Chinese people. Information about attacks from the Soviet Union were kept secret. To make things worse, the withdrawing troops destroyed
most of the railway and bridges to delay the attack, which also obstructed the
retreat for those helpless Japanese immigrants who mainly consisted of the
erelderly, the weak, women and children. Facing attacks from both the Soviet
Union army and the armed local people, cold weather, poor hygienic condi-
tions, malnutrition, epidemics and other diseases, countless people died, many
children were given away or abandoned, and some stranded women got mar-
rried to Chinese men for survival.

The First Repatriation

On Oct 1, 1952, the Chinese government announced its intention to help Jap-
anese orphans for return. Red Cross in both countries, together with non-gov-
ernment organizations, began to arrange passenger boats which repatriated
about 32,000 war-displaced Japanese until 1957. However, the Sino-Japanese
cooperation ceased in 1958 because the Japanese government refused to admit
the national flag of the People’s Republic of China on a stamp exhibition in
Nagasaki. More than 10,000 Japanese women and children were abandoned
again in China (Oba and Hashimoto 66; Araragi 2000b:25).

What made it worse was that the Japanese government declared those
unreturned Japanese dead and erased them from the household registry in
1959. In addition, the Japanese citizenship law attaches individuals to the na-
tion through the household registry. The death declarations can result in diffi-
culties for war orphans to be readmitted to citizenship and residence rights in
Japan. It became impossible to go back for those who longed to but hesitated
for considerations of families in China at the rupture of Sino-Japanese coop-
eration.

The Second Repatriation

It was not until 1972, when diplomatic relations were established between
the two countries, that remaining war orphans had opportunities to make
contacts with people in Japan. In August 1974, one Japanese volunteer group
published a series of letters and photographs looking for lost relatives on a na-
tional newspaper Asahi. The widespread concern and empathy from national
Globalization

In 1975, the Ministry of Justice in Japan proclaimed that war orphans were to be processed under immigrant regulations (Kinoshita 2003:13). Two subcategories were developed: the identified who held Japanese citizenship and the unidentified who was the majority since some of them were removed from Japan’s family registrations in the 1950s and some others held Chinese citizenship as inter-racial children between Chinese and Japanese. The latter group was allowed for a short visit in Japan with visas, which gave them chances to reconnect with Japanese family members and provoked their sense of longing for homeland.

In 1984, the unidentified war orphans were permitted to reside permanently in Japan if they had a qualified Japanese guarantor. The denial of government responsibilities in relocation and resettlement of those families posed an extra burden and elicited reluctance in many Japanese to be a guarantor, for the guarantor needed to take charge in all the paperwork, flight fees and war orphan’s resettlements in Japan. The blood connection can’t always fight against the realistic problems, for instance, financial burden, language difficulties, and loss of connections for many years. In 1989, the identification of legal immigrants was restricted to children of Japanese parentage, therefore step-children and adopted children by those Japanese in China were not allowed to come along to reside in Japan, which was a struggle for many war orphans to choose between homeland and family members in China.

In September 1993, twelve elderly stranded women returned to Japan from northeast China and stayed in the airport when visa expired. Without guarantors, they failed to be legalized as permanent citizens. They held a sign saying “Dear Prime Minister Hosokawa, please let us die in Japan”. The Japanese media gave widespread reports about this, which gave the impetus to a law that promoted smooth repatriation for stranded Japanese women in China. It was not until 1995 that the government admitted the responsibility of repatriating the remaining Japanese people in China and would pay for the return passage of both stranded women and war orphans. But many people had died with the longing of stepping on the land of origin. As of March 2005, 6,286 were permanently resettled in the second wave since 1972.
On 2006, a court in Japan awarded 468m yen ($2m) in compensation to 65 plaintiffs of war orphans, which was the first case to hold the Japanese government responsible for failing to repatriate them in time (Justin McCurry 2006). The plaintiffs were among 2,000 who had sought compensation through courts for the government’s failure in prompt repatriation and according support for their resettlements.

Narrations of War Orphans: Longing and Belonging

Even though the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare has sought to downplay distinctions between the suffering of war orphans and other Japanese who experienced the war, war orphans have gone through severer hardships: separation from family and homeland as infants or children, ill-treatment and discrimination as Japanese in China, and a new life full of difficulty in their culturally alien “homeland” of Japan.

In a famous Chinese novel <Auntie Duohe>, published by Yan Geling in 2008, Duohe was bought by a family to give birth to children because the wife in the family had a miscarriage and became infertile when being chased by a Japanese solidier. The family tried everything to hide her identity and required her to remain mute, considering the hatred towards Japanese colonists from the neighbourhood. But people cast suspicions on her identity again and again because of the different etiquette, for example the deep bows. The complex connections in this family became more tangled when Duohe gave birth to three kids. Because of her identity as a Japanese and the complex relationship in the family, they decided to move to a remote southern town and introduced her as the sister of the hostess, even her own three children called her auntie. But her experience was different from war orphans because she was already sixteen when being left in China and had enough knowledge of her nationality and culture. Even so, she was like a “half-disabled” person when returning to Japan with a guarantor of the girl she had saved in war time. “I can’t understand many of the Japanese language those people talk nowadays. It took me a long time to learn how to use washing machines and vending machines. I don’t dare to go to any store without company.” In the end, two
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of the three children and the husband followed Duohe to Japan, leaving the hostess alone with another son who was willing to stay in China.

Adopted Life in China

In 2015, Youhachi Nakajima published a memoir at the age of 73. He was left behind in China at age three and returned to Japan at sixteen. The book, *Why I have this life: memoir of a Japanese Orphan*, was published in both Chinese and Japanese at his own expense. The purpose was to show the gratitude to his adopted parents in China, clear up misunderstandings from the Japanese towards Chinese people, and promote friendship between the two countries.

In 1945, Nakajima’s father had been drafted and never came back. After his sister died of malnutrition in that freezing winter, his mother had no choice but to ask a local family to take him in. It was hard to find a willing family because he was ‘a child of the aggressor’. A kind female peasant adopted him, who massaged his belly and fed him with chewed food for the dyspepsia he was suffering from. When his birth mother returned to Japan, the three-year-old boy was too weak to follow and chose to stay with his foster mother. In addition to developing strong attachments to his foster parents, he also bonded with other kind people such as his teachers, classmates and villagers. He recalled the time he was bullied by a classmate, being called “Little Japanese”, a devil and derogatory name toward Japanese invaders, but the teacher interfered and taught the whole class about the differences of Japanese invaders and Japanese orphans, who were also victims of war.

In 1955, his birth mother reached out and invited him to come back to Japan, but he refused immediately, saying: “if they force me to go back, I will jump off the train.” However, his teacher encouraged him to return to Japan. He then became a member of the Japan-China friendship association regardless of the limited wages, even though he had a chance for well-paid jobs after graduation from high school in Japan.

But not everyone was as lucky as him. Ikeda, born in 1944, was entrusted to a Chinese family when her mother fled with four other older daughters. Her foster parents treated her well but she was relentlessly teased by other children in the neighbourhood. At school, when war movies were shown, she
was always the target, especially at some scenes of killing and burning by Japanese soldiers. She eventually got married to a Chinese man and became a teacher. Her Japanese parentage was known to the neighbourhood, therefore she always felt different. When she returned to Japan, her children entered Japanese public schools. But they were slow in learning language and were bullied for being “Chinese”. In China, she was teased as being Japanese. But in Japan, her children were assumed to be Chinese. Talking about her motivation to move back, she said, “All my life I’ve wondered, where did I come from? I wanted to know my own identity.” (Efird 2010)

Yet most war orphans were too small to remember much about their biological parents. Given the hatred towards Japanese colonialism, some foster parents chose to hide those children’s origins to avoid discrimination, even moving several times in order to keep it a secret. They were given Chinese names and reared as full-fledged members of Chinese society. Therefore many fostered Japanese in China grew up not realizing their true origins. Many children were ill-treated by their Chinese peers, but their foster families were generally kind and protective, and most war orphans expressed deep gratitude toward the foster parents in China (Ken 268). Many chose to stay in China because it was hard to cut ties and their elder adoptive parents needed to be taken care of.

**Life Back in Japan**

Many war orphans talked about their encounters in Japan. Even though they were of Japanese parentage, there was a huge gap between the country they grew up in and the country they thought they belonged to.

It has been observed that language works in two ways to construct difference: it is both a marker of difference and a tool for its expression (Harrell 2001). Many of the differences dividing the orphans arise from the timing of their return (Efird 2010:822). If people returned to Japan at a later age in their life, it was difficult for them to pick up the language, even though with some poor memories from childhood. Besides, there were few opportunities for them to learn Japanese as a second language because Japan was not an immigrant country and ancillary facilities for immigrants didn’t commonly exist.
However, language was an essential tool for them to find a job. In the four stories, only Nakijima had chances for high-salaried jobs because he returned to Japan at sixteen and finished high school in Japan. The other three mid-aged women could only find low-salaried jobs such as cleaning ladies that didn’t need much knowledge.

There is also a difference in culture and customs between the two countries. Many war orphans and their family members claim to have experienced forms of discrimination in the workplace due to language and culture. Most of them came from rural areas of China where life was dramatically different from what they would experience in Japan. As stated in a study (Tseng et al. 334), children who were separated from their Japanese parents before the age of three were less likely to retain Japanese social or interpersonal behaviours. They grew up as Chinese in many respects, including language, lifestyle and social adjustment. But there was a big chance for them to be distinguished from their Chinese counterparts. Therefore, Japan’s war orphans have been living a transnational life, with the longing to become part of the majority but lack some sense of belonging in either nation-state.

The great gap in customs and language between the country where they grew up in and the homeland they yearned for return frustrate their sense of belonging. Even after residing in Japan, many people find it hard to be fully accepted, not only in terms of blending into the Japanese society, but also parting from foster parents and families who went through the hardship together. The tragedy of family separation was repeated again for those war orphans.

A new obstacle has occurred for the repatriated orphans. As they drew near to sixty years old, the official retirement age in Japan, their income was reduced drastically because many of them couldn’t enjoy pensions due to short years of employment in Japan. To receive a full benefit of public pension, one must have paid monthly premiums for at least twenty-five years from ages between twenty and sixty, which was impossible for the middle-aged war orphans at their initial repatriations. Consequently, they were obliged to live on welfare and a frugal life after retirement.
Conclusions

The dislocation experiences of war orphans and stranded women are different from forced labor, the comfort women or other civilian people who experienced the war. This human tragedy was worsened by the neglect of the Japanese government: first, they were deserted in a foreign country and separated from their families at a young age; second, their status was changed from “missing” to “dead” in Japanese household registries without proper investigation; third, even after the rough repatriation, there was limited assistance in their resettlement in the homeland. Even with Japanese nationality, many war orphans claim that they don’t enjoy full benefits of Japanese citizenship. Now most of them are facing retirement and have problems with pensions, how long will they need to deal with questions of belonging in the homeland?

Many war orphans struggled to settle in their homeland, accompanied by their Chinese spouses and children, whose motivation was different from repatriated war orphans. For the second or third generation of repatriated orphans, only 25 percent received Japanese language classes as of 2002. But most of them can enjoy language classes at school as many foreigners appear in Japan nowadays. The repatriated parents now urge schools to establish a place for repatriated children to learn and speak Chinese, and talk about China, etc (Efird 2004: 127). About the identity of second and third generations of war orphans, will they treat themselves as Japanese or Chinese? War orphans are strategic victims of time and war, which caused them great losses in longing and belonging. Will that continue in their offspring?
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CERTAIN THREADS OR lines of thought always seem to be noted when reading about the contemporary German artist Anselm Kiefer. Scholars point to Kiefer’s importance in his home nation of Germany, but they are quick to point out that Kiefer was embraced more widely and much sooner in other countries. He is usually discussed without many artistic comparisons, outside of Joseph Beuys who was once his teacher, because Kiefer is considered to be somewhat of an outlier in terms of his artistic style and aesthetic strategies. His work is often cited as being deeply unsettling, or at least difficult to understand, because he constantly makes reference to subject matters such as Norse mythology, Jewish mysticism, and the Third Reich which are unknown to many audiences. In more general terms, Kiefer touches on issues of history, myth, memory, and identity in a way that calls for a further elaboration of his understanding of these areas.

It is especially Kiefer’s aesthetic strategies that have evoked a considerable amount of comment and discussion among art historians and scholars from various fields not immediately concerned with art. These strategies vary considerably comprising Kiefer’s use of objects as symbols as well as the specific functions of certain materials such as lead, straw, and sand. The focus is to discuss first how scholars interpret Kiefer’s understanding of history in general, and his aesthetic representation of (German) history in particular. By way of discussing Kiefer’s aesthetic strategies, this essay will concomitantly take a closer look at the various scholarly approaches towards Kiefer’s aesthetic representation of historical events. In particular, approaches that are deeply ingrained in deconstructive theory, which seem to be especially condu-
cive to an understanding of Kiefer’s aesthetic, and more specifically, to the role that undecidability plays in his work. There are then several key questions at stake. How have scholars discussed this Unentscheidbarkeit inscribed in Kiefer’s work; how have they avoided it, and what sorts of larger implications could its application have for the artist’s work?

In order to comprehend Kiefer’s intervention into and focus on German history, one must understand the complicated genesis of the post-World War II debate on the Holocaust and National Socialism in Germany in general, a debate that culminated in the so-called Historikerstreit of the 1980s. This historians’ quarrel was a multifarious controversy that involved disputes over differences in historical perspective of generations, the politicization of history, historical research methods, and the bounds of objectivity in dealing with major events in Germany’s life. However, the Historikerstreit was really more than a dispute among academics; it helped to surface diverging attitudes towards the political direction of Germany and the extent of moral responsibility that the nation should claim for its past transgressions. While numerous intellectuals contributed to this debate from both the conservative right and liberal left, the dialectic coalesced around the ideas of historian Ernst Nolte and social philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

Ernst Nolte’s position involved the revising and relativizing of the German nation’s relation to its troubled past, forty years after the end of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. He related the Bolshevik Russian treatment of its enemies to the Nazi treatment of Jews in the hopes of relativizing the moral outrage of the latter by arguing that it was not as unique a phenomenon as it was thought to be. In a short piece titled “The Past Will Not Pass Away,” which appeared on June 6, 1986 in the prominent German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Nolte argued that the current generation of Germans should be allowed to embrace its national past without a permanent sense of guilt and responsibility.

Jürgen Habermas spoke out against the views of the “revisionist” camp led by Nolte. Habermas argued that a recognition/acknowledgement and understanding of the negativity of the German national heritage was paramount as it “liberates the power of reflective memory.” Habermas argued for an approach that did not look passively at the past to provide a course for
the future by engaging in self-interested selectivity, but rather he proposed actively choosing historically-based values in the present to lay a basis for future direction.\(^6\)

It is against this backdrop that art historian Matthew Biro discusses Kiefer’s work as a specific intervention into the debate about German history in general and as a response to the *Historiokéstreit* of the 1980s. Since the late-1960s, the normative principle for German art and visual culture was *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but by the 1980s, the imperative to remember shifted focus toward how and what to remember.\(^7\) Biro believes that “hermeneutic undecidability” and “reflexivity” are at the heart of Kiefer’s artist program and his understanding of history. He defines hermeneutic undecidability as, “the ability of a cultural representation to generate not just ambiguity but a conflict of interpretations: radically contradictory readings of the same set of signifiers.”\(^8\) He connects this idea to Kiefer, when he argues that Kiefer often juxtaposes different historical time frames and forms of signification in order to provoke the viewer to compare and contrast different temporal and spatial contexts.\(^9\) Reflexivity can be understood as the, “physical and existential view of self-consciousness evoked by a particular set of visual and linguistic signifiers.”\(^10\) Biro sees Kiefer’s main challenge as an artist to be balancing the moral imperative to remember and the impossible task of representing the past. Therefore, viewers should not try to boil down the myriad references in his works of art, but they should focus on the binary oppositions that exist in conjunction with the historical, cultural, and social contexts to which they refer.

Biro illustrates his argument by explaining one of Kiefer’s paintings titled *Margarete*, which Biro finds to be successful in its production of both undecidability and reflexivity. The title refers to Paul Celan’s famous poem *Death Fugue*, which he wrote in 1945 about the Holocaust and life in Nazi concentration camps. Central to the poem are two female figures, the golden-haired Margarete, who is meant to represent Germans, and the ashen-haired Shulamith, who is meant to represent Jews. In *Margarete*, viewers are confronted with a landscape covered with straw, which serves to simultaneously create a horizontal ground layer while also forming points of verticality. This straw has been crudely over-painted, and Kiefer has added flames on the ends of the ver-
tical bundles of straw; he also scrawled the name “Margarete” in the middle of the painting. Biro argues that “[i]n this work, Kiefer juxtaposes gestural, linguistic, material, and mimetic elements.” By contending that “[Y]our golden hair, Margarete” is one of the few lines in the poem potentially spoken from the German perspective, Biro argues that “by identifying his representation with one of the few subjective images attributed to the victimizer in ‘Death Fugue,’ Kiefer seems to connect a Jewish representation of the German perpetrator to his own person.” As soon as viewers realize this connection, they are confronted with understanding the interplays of straw and paint, likeness and reality, word and image. Biro offers several readings of various aspects of the work, but his primary point is to stress that these binaries, which he calls “undecidable citations,” help to illustrate the importance of a process of discourse and scrutiny that is involved in remembering and depicting the past.

Earlier, German Studies scholar Andreas Huyssen made a similar argument concerning the “undecidability” in Kiefer’s work. Huyssen sees Kiefer as working in defiance of all of the complicated and academic explanations for his use of mythical themes, names, and materials. For Huyssen, no amount of critical reading or explanation will ever unite all the disparate parts of Kiefer’s program. He argues that the viewer does not need to be an expert on all the references that Kiefer makes in his work. It is up to the viewer to decide how much he or she wishes to engage and follow the threads of Kiefer’s mythic references.

One of the key characteristics for Huyssen is that Kiefer’s work can be accessible while simultaneously remaining elusive, in the sense that seeing and interpreting can never come full circle. According to Huyssen, this elusiveness results from the fact that Kiefer never tells the complete story in a single picture. Instead, Kiefer takes up different parts of a myth in different pictures, and the objects that he uses to signify the myth operate in different capacities in other series as well. This complicated narrative web, as Huyssen describes it, resists a full coming together to form a meta-narrative. Huyssen furthers his argument when he opines that Kiefer’s art is most effective when it functions at the associative rather than narrative level. A significant level of participation from the viewer seems important for Huyssen, as he believes that Kiefer’s art should not be viewed as a vehicle for forgetting and moving on
from the troubled past of recent German history, but it should be understood as being emphatically about memory.\textsuperscript{18} However, rather than continue to discuss Kiefer’s references to the past, he discusses Kiefer’s work as responding to various movements that occurred in Germany from the 1960s through the 1980s. Huyssen propounds, “Rather than merely illustrating myth or history, Kiefer’s work can be read as a sustained reflection on how mythic images function in history.”\textsuperscript{19} 

It seems that the underlying assumptions of Huyssen’s and Biro’s arguments are deeply ingrained in narrativity theory. Huyssen and Biro both posit that since one of Kiefer’s primary aims in his artwork is to create layers of association that offer viewers the space to think about very complex and loaded issues, one should not try to read Kiefer’s artworks in order to construct an overarching narrative. Huyssen’s and Biro’s positions imply that Kiefer’s work could be understood in a narrative approach, but such a method would miss an important aspect of Kiefer’s artistic agenda. What would this narrative approach look like? Does taking a narrative approach in the understanding of Kiefer mean to read a painting by trying to unite all the seemingly disparate elements of the work in order to create an overarching structure?

Mark Rosenthal, an art historian and former curator, has been credited with having written perhaps the most authoritative, and simultaneously the most controversial, work on Kiefer’s artistic program from the late-1960s through the late-1980s.\textsuperscript{20} Rosenthal offers a different reading than that of Biro or Huyssen, as he takes a somewhat formalist approach, focusing on iconography and the classification of tropes, while Biro and Huyssen focus on content in the tradition of ideology critique. In a series of essays, Rosenthal provides an overview of Kiefer’s life and a proposed evolution of his approach to his art.\textsuperscript{21} To a certain extent, Rosenthal takes a biographical approach to understanding Kiefer by using the artist’s works to create a grand narrative of his artistic life. He contends that at the beginning of his career, Kiefer eschewed the styles of art that were successful internationally and instead worked on developing a style and viewpoint that was distinctly German. Rosenthal sees Kiefer’s early works as trying to explore his own psyche and that of the German people. He believes that Kiefer engaged with Nazi subject matter in order to try to understand the actions and moments of the past. Rosenthal establishes
a method to reading Kiefer that involves understanding the context of a title of a work in relation to the use of various tropes. He explains the evolution of the meanings of several tropes such as the attic or artist’s studio, the snake, fire, the palette, and water. Rosenthal is focused on “Kiefer’s iconography” as he terms it, since he believes Kiefer is interested in how history is constructed and probes those meanings in his work. Rosenthal argues that Kiefer uses a handful of tropes in which the artist endows multiple meanings in order to express complex narratives; whereby, Kiefer collapses history by synthesizing components of several time periods in one work of art. Rosenthal contends that by developing his own pictorial language or system of signs, Kiefer is able to challenge his German audience to look at the past in order to recall the history of events that led to the twentieth century. For Rosenthal, the tropes are the key to understanding Kiefer’s work, because though the artist may find new frameworks or references, the form and content of his work remains the same.

With an approach similar to Rosenthal’s, Michael Auping, Chief Curator at the Modern Museum of Art in Fort Worth, Texas, explains various works of Kiefer’s by honing in on several key tropes, the attic, the forest, and the artists palette and relating them to biographical facts about Kiefer’s life. Auping argues for linear readings of Kiefer, in which he interprets works through a decoding of these various symbols. He explains how titles directly relate to the art and how the properties of certain materials (i.e. lead) relate to specific works and meanings. Auping understands Kiefer’s use of tropes as a way for the artist not only to work through the legacy of Nazism, but also to reclaim German culture by creating his own structure of meaning. Ultimately, Auping sees Kiefer’s work as redemptive, and he argues that it incorporates the Romantic tradition and Abstract Expressionist characteristics, while also recovering images and symbols that hold historic relevance.

Rosenthal and Auping both focus primarily on decoding and classifying Kiefer’s use of various tropes. By focusing on these tropes, both scholars believe that Kiefer is interested in how history functions and can be constructed. In their analyses, Rosenthal and Auping state that Kiefer uses these tropes to communicate complex narratives. Their preoccupation with classification leads them to deem certain works of Kiefer’s tragic and calamitous,
while others are determined to be more redemptive in nature. They use the
tropes to elucidate certain motifs. The goal here is not to continue to think
about debunking Rosenthal and Auping and other scholars who engage in
similar debates.\textsuperscript{25} Their catalogs are useful in that they do help identify mean-
ings of tropes and provide particular readings of certain works of art. In order
to return to the fundamental issue of undecidability in Kiefer’s work, it would
seem prudent at this point to discuss issues of narrative first to understand
their relationship.

Rosenthal’s and Auping’s work could be understood in the way Hayden
White discusses various conceptions of historical reality.\textsuperscript{26} White begins with
the claim that “narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of
general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing
into telling.”\textsuperscript{27} White makes a clear distinction between narrative and what
he calls narrativity. Narrative, according to White, is an account of the reality
that one perceives, while narrativity imposes the structure of a story upon
that reality.\textsuperscript{28} While it may seem like White is making a distinction without
difference, his differentiation becomes important when he posits, “Narrative
becomes a problem only when we wish to give to real events the form of story.
It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativ-
ization is so difficult.”\textsuperscript{29} He illustrates his point by discussing the properties of
the historical forms of writing in annals, chronicles, and history proper. White
distinguished annals and chronicles as somewhat incomplete forms of narrat-
vity; whereby, they are records of events, but their forms do not bring clo-
sure but abruptly end or terminate.\textsuperscript{30} White contends that historical accounts
bring about closure to their sequences of events by providing an assessment
against some sort of moral system.\textsuperscript{31} He therefore ends his investigation with
the question, “Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?”\textsuperscript{32}

Both White and Kiefer would answer this question in the negative. Due to the unavoidable practice of moralization, Kiefer is not interested in
narrativizing German history. It is not that Kiefer does not have a point of
view or an interpretation of the legacy of the German nation, but rather that
he forces viewers to take a stand when looking at his work. With this under-
standing, we then need to return to the issues at the heart of the Historiker-
streit. Regardless of which camp one identifies with in the proper approach
to history, both groups (right and left) did reach agreement on two points of historical concern. The first is that the crimes against humanity carried out under Hitler’s regime were done by those convinced of the justness of their cause and acceptability of their actions, so any attempt to simply write them off as “monsters” would fail to recognize the “fine line between normalcy and deviation that exists at the centre of modern civilized societies.” The second is that when any contemporary historian composes a national history, he or she is always offering either a positive or negative example for the reader, a set of values and characteristics that help to define what it is to be a certain nationality. If Kiefer is choosing to deal with history and German history, which he clearly is given his choice of topics, how does he work around these two issues? How does he negotiate this fine line without creating the allegedly inevitable positive or negative associations? The answer lies in Kiefer’s ability to create the existence of undecidability in his works through deconstruction. Therefore, what will follow will be several deconstructive readings of certain works by Anselm Kiefer. Each work will begin with a narrative, contextual reading (akin to Rosenthal) followed by a deconstructive interpretation.

Kiefer became interested in the Old Testament story of the Exodus after his return from a trip to Israel in 1984. We can see this interest in his 1984 painting *Departure from Egypt*. In this tableau, Kiefer explores the drama of the Exodus through Aaron rather than his brother Moses, who is normally considered to be the main character of the story. We identify Aaron through the leaden staff that is also present in the work, *Aaron*, of the same year. Kiefer sets the scene in a burned, or desert, landscape very similar to his earlier German ones such as *Nero Paints* and *March Heath*, both from 1974. While this rod was a source of redemption and transformation in a number of different contexts, Aaron himself became a controversial figure when he defied the orders of his brother Moses (and thereby God) by creating the Golden Calf at the behest of the Israelites. Rosenthal makes the connection between Kiefer’s rod of Aaron and Joseph Beuys’ (a mentor of Kiefer’s) “Eurasian Staff” that Beuys hoped would bring about a kind of unity between Eastern transcendence and Western materialism. Aaron’s rod representing the East and Kiefer’s landscape that draws from his prior German, and therefore Western, ones suggest the artist’s want of miraculous restoration.
This interplay of destruction and restoration is one particular reading of *Departure from Egypt*. If we read Kiefer’s painting as being about the importance of restorative acts, then we interpret the work as pertaining to the restoration of German history. He places a rod with redemptive powers in the scorched landscape that simultaneously references the biblical context and the somewhat scorched legacy of German history. If he had used Moses as the subject of his work rather than Aaron, this reading might hold.

Kiefer’s reference to Aaron points toward his deconstruction of the destruction/restoration binary. In the story of the Golden Calf, Aaron is left with two choices. He could decide not to construct the idol and obey Moses, and therefore God, which would demonstrate his singular responsibility to the Lord. The other option would be to build the Golden Calf to satisfy the Israelites who grow anxious during Moses’ absence, which would demonstrate his general responsibility to the multitude. The conventional reading of the story would state that Aaron behaved irresponsibly by building the statue and thereby disobeying his faith to God, his singular responsibility. An alternative reading would be to see the paradox that Aaron behaved both responsibly and irresponsibly. By making the calf, he was responsible to the Israelites but he behaved irresponsibly towards God; if he had denied their request he would have been irresponsible towards the multitude and responsible to God. It would be impossible to have irresponsibility without responsibility, so there really is not an oppositional here.

Similarly, restoration and destruction are problematic as a binary. If we are to read Kiefer’s work as pertaining to a restoration of the destruction of the past, then we are essentially stating that Kiefer is narrativizing history. A restoration of the past would imply a whitewashing or destruction of the past, so *Departure from Egypt* would be about the destruction of destruction. Destruction can be restorative and restoration can be destructive; they are indistinguishable. The meaning of Kiefer’s work here is ultimately undecidable.

There are numerous possibilities to piece together his material use of lead and straw, adoption of biblical symbols, and references to previous works. By having these objects have no fixed meaning, Kiefer is offering a way of constructing a history that was already constructed. His work is offering a means for discourse.
Kiefer’s *The Milky Way*, from 1985-1987, is concerned with another important binary in his work, heaven and earth. In this painting, we have another scorched landscape, which Auping suggests is a rural battlefield of World War II, with a large white tear running through the middle with the words *die Milchstrasse* written inside. A lead funnel that is attached to the canvas with wires enters the laceration and appears to be both sending and receiving light from the white gash. Auping argues, “The cone suggests a connector, a funnel in which the heavens are being poured into the earth to regenerate it or, conversely, a megaphone calling from earth to a higher power.” The presence of lead and the golden glow of the painting would seem to refer to the occurrence of an alchemical transformation. Since lead emits pure white clouds when burned, *The Milky Way* depicts a transformation from battle site to the Promised Land of milk and golden honey. Such a reading, once again, places Kiefer as an artist concerned with the restoration of history.

Kiefer seems to be investigating the idea of structure in *The Milky Way*. The words *die Milchstrasse* operate as a floating signifier. On one level, the words represent the Milky Way or the galaxy that contains our solar system. On a different level, *die Milchstrasse* can be taken quite literally in the sense that he has constructed a white stream, or milky way, right in the middle of the painting. He has blurred the concepts of heaven and earth and even subverted the primacy of heaven over earth. If the Milky Way (the heavens) contains our solar system, then are we here on Earth also part of the Milky Way?

If Kiefer offers his viewers a deconstructionist version of history, what does such a practice say about how he specifically thinks about history? He is clearly intervening in the debate on history, but how are we to understand the nature of his participation? His intervention is not similar to the underlying political agenda of Abstract Expressionists several decades before; a movement that strove to create highly abstract and non-representational works that were outside the bounds of political and societal (in the form of rampant consumerism) manipulation due to a high degree of unintelligibility. Kiefer creates highly representational works that are clearly intelligible, but this very intelligibility folds in on itself to reveal the undecidable. Kiefer is not focusing on one particular history, but he stresses the debate around history or the existence of innumerable histories. His stance, which is that viewers need
to take a stand, is not typical and the meaning in his work exists on a largely metaphysical level.

In order to create this debate, Kiefer probes the threshold between memory and history. In fact, we could go so far as to say he is deconstructing the very binary of history and memory, which is going beyond the debate in Germany in the 1980s. During the time of the Historikerstreit, French historian Pierre Nora was working on the differences of history and memory rather than how history should be remembered and conceptualized. From his standpoint, there was an ever-increasing gap between memory—the unconscious remembering of events that ebbs and flows with generations—and history—the conscious organization of the past. For Nora, this gap became existent with the emergence of historiography, in particular, the history of the development of the nation. Nora continues his argument by stating that due to this historiographical age that is so concerned with the development of memory, history and memory become dissociated because memory becomes an object of history. Therefore, Nora’s realms of memory (les lieux de mémoire) are objects or sites—museums, archives, holidays, monuments—that stand to preserve memory that has been made historical. There is a fundamental gap between true memory and memory that has been catalogued into history, or as Nora articulates, “The quest for memory is the search for one’s history.”

Nora’s argument aids in understanding how Kiefer’s deconstructive strategy works in relation to history and memory. There is no distinction at this point between these two concepts, and Kiefer points to the breakdown of this binary in his own work. He is interested in the same types of cultural markers with which Nora is concerned. He wants to look at national sentiment through various concepts and ideas that in some way reflect something about Germany. He looks at Nazi practices, Jewish practices, and Teutonic myth; however, he also uses sources—Epic of Gilgamesh and Egyptian mythology—that seemingly have no connection to the German nation. The materials he uses are replete with irony such as planes made of lead which will not fly or rooms made of wood that are full of lit candles. This irony points to the fact that memory no longer exists due to the formation of history, but histories are formed in order to bolster the idea of memory.
It is not enough to say that Kiefer’s intervention on history is simply to point out that histories are necessarily constructions. This point is only part of his overall strategy. The role of undecidability enhances the concepts of history and memory. By opening a discourse, viewers are forced to think about the relationship between these concepts. The greater question becomes how do you build realms of memory in a society that has a severely complex relationship with the recent past? Moreover, the very idea of German history is a construction and has always been so, on many levels, is all history. History, as an abstraction, or even a concrete concept, is wholly unrepresentable. By painting a particular history, or one that is easily understood and readily available, Kiefer would necessarily be simultaneously engaging in an act of forgetting by closing off a particular narrative. The use of the undecidable allows Kiefer to create an indeterminable number of significations through his repetition of motifs and usage of tropes.

Therefore, we should understand the linear, narrative readings of his works not only as a particular method for deciphering his works, but also as representative of a particular understanding of history. The various articulations and interpretations involve a specific restructuring of the discontinuities of the past. Such a method reminds us of Walter Benjamin’s reading of Paul Klee’s *New Angel*; the angel of history who interprets the past as a singular event, while we see a series. Method aside, there is an expectation that art is created to take a stand or particular point of view. This expectation became increasingly more critical with the on-set of Modernism, when all art seemingly became increasingly politicized. What does it mean then for an artist to take on a highly political topic only to create artwork where he or she does not take a complete stance by showing a particular point-of-view?

Barnett Newman was once quoted as stating, “[T]he artist is approached not as an original thinker in his own medium, but, rather, as an instinctive, intuitive executant who, largely unaware of what he is doing, breaks through the mystery by the magic of his performance to ‘express’ truths the professionals think they can read better than he can himself.” All too often scholars look to speak beyond the true intentions of artists when discussing particular works of art or comprehensive bodies of work. Kiefer’s work seems to shift focus away from the artist and firmly into the hands of the viewer. This
statement seems to make little sense given that many of Kiefer’s strategies seemingly refer to the artist. His use of numerous materials, the scale of his works, the loaded subject matter, and the crudity of the constructions would all seem to be self-referential. Kiefer once again offers a deconstruction here, though not in the sense that we are somehow all artists. The undecidability of his work problematizes the normal didactic expectations that we have for art. Kiefer does not propose a particular way to understand the difficult issues around the German past; he just offers a space for maximal consideration.
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4. See note 1.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 117.

9. Ibid., 118.

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11. Ibid., 129.

12. Ibid., 130.

13. Ibid., 131.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 91.

17. Ibid., 92.


19. Ibid., 27.


27. Ibid., 5.

28. Ibid., 6.

29. Ibid., 8.

30. Ibid., 21-22.

31. Ibid., 24.

32. Ibid., 27.


34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 258.


37. This explanation of responsibility and irresponsibility from the Old Testament in this paragraph was derived from a similar reading in relation to Abraham and Isaac in Nicole Anderson, “deconstruction and Ethics: An (ir)responsibility,” in *Jacques Derrida Key Concepts*, ed. Claire Colebrook, 48-57 (New York: Routledge, 2015), 54-55.

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Andrew D’Ambrosio
WHEN DID I KNOW I WAS BLACK?

THE BLACK DIASPORA IN

HIGHER EDUCATION

Jacqueline L. Christie

The Dartmouth administration is racist and Dartmouth is built on racism. People of color are not statistics, we’re people and our voices should be heard, but our voices are not being heard.

—Dartmouth professor as quoted in The Dartmouth on Thursday, May 26, 2016.

Dartmouth student Melissa Padilla said faculty members of color have helped her deal with racism from professors and students. ‘They can relate to all of the weird things you have to navigate as a student of color on campuses like Dartmouth.’

—Vermont Public Radio May 24, 2016

So grateful to be able to speak my truth, in a place [Harvard University] that wasn’t historically meant for me to thrive.

—Donovan Livingston, a graduating student during his speech at Harvard University, May 2016
THE BLACK DIASPORA

The black diaspora provides a framework for addressing recent media portrayals of race in Ivy League institutions, and for understanding the experiences of black students in institutions of higher education. As R. Radhakrishnan states in his essay *Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora* (2003),

> the diaspora is an excellent opportunity to think through some of these vexed questions; solidarity and criticism, belonging and distance, insider spaces and outsider spaces, identity as invention and identity as natural, location-subject positionality and the politics of representation, rootedness and rootlessness (p. 129).

*Souls Looking Back* by Andrew Garrod, a collection of personal narratives by black college students from Dartmouth College, McGill University, and Simmons College, delves into the role of blackness and the black diaspora in higher education. The students differ in appearance, socio-economic and cultural status, and gender. Yet their identity as black is prominent in their interactions with higher education as outlined in this collection.

The students’ stories, told in first person narrative, unravel how students navigate social expectations of black people. They address how the negative stereotypes of black people play out when black students join majority white educational institutions and how black students navigate their identity when entering higher education. They help answer whether: a) looking at black students as a diaspora helps understand the problems they encounter; b) the diaspora uncovers problems the institutions (host cultures) encounter in trying to serve black students; and, c) the diaspora helps determine what can and should be done to ensure all are educated. The essays question if the black diaspora is created through “othering” by the powerful, according to racial characteristics. Or, is it formed as part of the process of black students creating their own identities? Or, can it be both? While these students’ stories
Jacqueline L. Christie

were published almost 20 years ago, recent experiences around race relations in the Ivy League imbue their voices with relevance today.

BRIEFLY, THE THEORISTS: DuBois, Gilroy, Fanon, Cross

In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois describes the experience of double consciousness as “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of a racist white society, as well as reconciling an African heritage with an upbringing in a European-dominated society” (Chapter 1). Paul Gilroy’s essay “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity” (2003) expands DuBois’ definition - “striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness” (Gilroy, p. 50). Gilroy cautions that the true struggle of the black diaspora is “to have blacks perceived as agents, as people with cognitive capacities and with an intellectual history – attributes denied by modern racism” (Gilroy, p. 53).

DuBois’s and Gilroy’s work raise many questions while reading the narratives in *Souls Looking Back*. Can black students work through double consciousness resulting from navigating often contradictory black and white cultures encountered in higher education institutions? How does education help them craft their sense of self? Is DuBois’s hope that education is the answer to double consciousness valid to these black student narrators? What are the responsibilities of the white institutions to the black diaspora within?

Frantz Fanon in his work, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), contends that rather than schooling, blacks exploring their identity must first embark on “disalienation,” a process where black people no longer turn to the majority white culture to be seen, but instead have a possibility of existence on their own terms, no longer relying on the oppressor for identity. W.E. Cross’s Negro-to-Black Conversion experience, or Nigrescence, builds on Fanon and states racial identity is a “maturation process whereby negative external images are replaced with positive internal conceptions” (Robinson, p. 87). His five stages distinguish between personal and group identity, providing dual aspects helpful to analyzing black diasporas in higher education.
BLACK STUDENT NARRATIVES

Close reading of five essays from *Souls Looking Back*, reveals key aspects of the black diaspora in higher education: identity formation and fluidity, group identity as a survival resource, “othering,” DuBois’s double consciousness, and differences within the diaspora. The five students include:

*Liz* – An African-American student who, prior to college, attended an elite country day school and a top prep school, isolating her from students who looked like her. Her parents’ differing skin tones - one dark skinned, one lighter skinned, but both black - influenced how they parented Liz, a dark skinned child.

*Maria* – An African-American student raised in a predominantly white suburb, with middle-class privilege, Maria experienced few opportunities for black friendships until an African literature course and a support group for black academics provided a means to explore her identity as a black woman.

*Rick* – A child of poverty and extreme “risk factors” in his majority black neighborhood and home (i.e., drugs, dangerous schools), Rick navigated his way to an elite, predominantly white college through the support of an elementary school principal and a best friend who also chose to avoid a life of drugs and continued poverty.

*Steve* – The eldest son of Trinidadian parents, Steve was raised in an affluent, predominantly white setting where his father’s status as a doctor included membership in a high socio-economic class. He found himself struggling to befriend students who look like him due to his own negative stereotypes of African-Americans.

*Susanna* – As a biracial child of a Swiss mother and an African-American father, Susanna was the only child of color in her public school system, moving exclusively in white circles. An exchange program with a black woman’s college enabled her to feel respected in her racial identity.

Initial Identities
Despite their distinct differences, the five narrators’ stories are connected by their strong academic records, as well as their need to determine what being black meant for them individually. Maria remembered, “growing up in suburbia, I was just another happy, self-confident, smart kid, who happened to be black” (Garrod, p. 32). Until college, her label of smart “seemed to supercede and almost erase any other label of race or class that I could personify” (Garrod, p. 34). Steve admitted that because he succeeded with his primary identity as a good student in all-white settings, he did not explore his black identity until college. He personified “the stigma in black society that to be smart was to act white” (Garrod, p. 157).

**Jarring Incidents**

Narrators all identify Cross’s “jarring incident” that forced them to rethink their primary identity as a good student and address being black. The narrators speak to being made aware of their blackness when asked to represent their entire race. These representations often coincided with Martin Luther King’s Birthday or Black History Month. As Maria stated,

> every day except January 15, I was a smart kid, just me.  
> On the 15, I was black and expected to exhibit or add the  
> ‘multi’ to any classroom discussion of other cultures. De-  
> pending on the year, I felt pride or irritation at the task”  
> (Garrod, p 38).

Susanna speaks for many narrators when she says, “I’m tired of explaining. I’m sick of being the spokesperson for all black people” (Garrod, p. 134).

For Maria, applying to college provided the “pivotal moment that forced me to think about my status as a black person in a white world” (Garrod, p. 32). After being accepted into many prestigious colleges, Maria felt pride in her accomplishments until she overheard a classmate say, “she only got in because she’s black” (Garrod, p. 33). This remark, the first she remembers as identifying her as black, instilled a period of self-doubt during which Maria wondered if whites really saw her as “black first and intelligent, ambitious, and compelling second” (Garrod, p. 33).
Othering and DuBois Again

The student narratives echo DuBois. Susanna states, “it seems my racial identity was discovered and defined by recognizing someone else’s race. To see myself, I had to see someone else [who was different/white]” (Garrod, p. 137). Steve recalls a childhood incident in which dancing to black music verified others’ opinions of Steve’s blackness. “People expected me to dance because I had ‘rhythm’ as all black people supposedly do. Once again, I fell into their little trap of what was expected of me” (Garrod, p. 151). For Liz, the overriding message of her childhood was her father’s advice “you have to be at least twice as good” (Garrod, p. 113). Susanna states,

I know I am a human being and I have as much right to be in these places as white people. But I’m not white and it matters that I am not. Everyone of these [white] faces that watches me as I sit down to eat, or follows me up the aisle as I pick out jeans, knows that it matters… It all has to do with my skin, so I feel uncomfortable because that is their only basis for judging me. What they react to is my genealogy, not me…my genealogy is inescapable, and in this society, it defines me (Garrod, p. 136).

Diaspora as Resource for Immersion

The student narrators learn “the strategies black students must learn in order to negotiate educational and social environments” found in most colleges (Garrod, p. 42). They also reflect Pattie’s (2005) statement that each diaspora worries about “finding the right balance between accommodation of the host culture and assimilation into it” (Pattie, p. 59), and speak to the importance of finding their voice and identity as part of navigating higher education on their own terms. During this navigation, the narrators move through Cross’s immersion and emersion stage by rejecting white culture. Steve immerses himself in blackness, the black diaspora, at his mixed race high school as “this was my last chance to salvage any relations with black people” (Garrod, p. 153).
An exchange term at a black women’s college allowed Susanna to feel respected, understood, proud of her black racial identity.

The impact of being taught almost exclusively by black people was intense, consciousness altering, and awesome [...] simply because everywhere I looked I saw images of myself... More precisely, I didn’t have to think about my blackness because it was taken almost for granted” [...] “For the first time I made friends with people to whom I did not have to explain myself [...] Not only did the women look like me but we shared experiences. I could express myself without having to worry about offending anyone or being labeled as crazy (Garrod, p. 147).

Upon arriving at college, Maria because of her suburban upbringing possessed the skills required to succeed in a majority white institution, but did not know how to navigate her identity as a black woman. She declined invitations to the black societies on campus because she did not feel “black enough” (Garrod, p. 42). Her black roommate from an inner city environment faced the opposite problem. She was secure in her blackness (i.e., joining black student groups), but not in navigating the culturally white reality of the college. Their relationship brought home to Maria how little she knew about blackness. Maria’s college coursework and interest in African literature eventually helped her work through her blackness. Being accepted into a black student fellowship “helped me find a way to begin reconciling identity issues with my academic and professional aspirations” (Garrod, p. 44).

Differences Within Diaspora

Anthias (2010) cautions against constructs that homogenize a culture and ignore diversity within a group (e.g., class, gender); homogenous categories are used to marginalize the minority group’s concerns as cultural, invalid arguments about equality or opportunities for advancement. Lisa Lowe’s analysis in “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences”
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(2003) of Asian-Americans warns that African-American can be a hegemonic term obscuring differences in the black diaspora, where each member’s identity is a function of their unique circumstances.

While at an all black college, Susanna viewed differences in skin tone and physical features, but recognized “we were all black women. Whatever the differences in our backgrounds, we shared this one crucial trait” (Garrod, p. 147). Liz spent her childhood isolated from black people.

I know that many of my experiences [elite education] have separated me from other blacks. I will always walk a thin line to maintain my racial identity, but race will always bond me with others […] so much of my identity revolves around my struggle to find an individual identity as a black woman growing up in a predominantly white environment (Garrod, p. 120).

Steve’s upbringing with Trinidadian parents points both to the importance of home culture and the “othering” by the host culture in forming diasporas. Steve’s childhood was culturally white, with strict parents who emphasized education and who brought him up in white suburbs. However, the world viewed him as black because of his physical features. Steve attested to his own prejudices against black people. “Basically I bought into the white stereotypes of black people” (Garrod, p. 152). He also felt he did not fit the expected definitions of American blackness. “I lived in a white neighborhood and had mostly white friends. Therefore I wasn’t really black” (Garrod, p. 152). Interactions during college with black groups allowed him to test his assumptions and become comfortable in the diaspora.

Rick, like Steve, mentioned that he “bought into the stereotype that society portrays of blacks and whites in the United States” (Garrod, p. 220). He mentioned the importance of class in his upbringing, “the stereotype that whites are inherently smarter than blacks can easily be accepted by some when you aren’t aware of the two distinct playing fields” (Garrod, p. 221). Because of his lower economic background, Rick lived on an uneven playing field until finding his own identity as an educated black man in college.
ROLE OF THE HOST CULTURE / HIGHER EDUCATION

The views and choices of the black diaspora students do not exist in isolation. The black diaspora resides in a world where “it is easy for a white person to live without having to examine the meaning of being white. This neglect of racial significance can impede a white person’s self-awareness, a crucial factor in racial identity development” (Robinson, p. 88). The educational institution, or in diasporic terms the host culture, influences the students and their relationship with the black diaspora. The black diaspora, in turn, imposes changes on the university. But to what extent can institutions change to assist students of the black diaspora? As Ifekwunigwe (2008) states,

Most importantly, are indigenous White English residents prepared to redefine what it means to be English in order to include on equal footing both Metis(se) as well as English born children of so-called immigrant parents, whose natal origin are South Asian, Caribbean, or continental African? (Ifekwunigwe, p. 198)

If one replaces “White English” with “White College” and asks if colleges are ready to redefine what it means to be a student in their institution, Ifekwunigwe’s question generates additional questions for colleges and universities. What keeps us from developing empathy with the diaspora? Where does the majority’s lack of acceptance of minority cultures come from? Is it simply lack of understanding of the minority culture or is it specific and deliberate rejection? The narratives in Souls Looking Back describe how white students and white adults react to students’ “blackness”, providing guidance in answering these questions.

Each narrator in the collection stated they often allow “a certain slack for inexperience” of white people dealing with blacks (Garrod, p. 40), raising the question, what do whites personally and white institutions need to “allow” for their interactions with blacks? The minority and majority must understand each other’s worlds.
Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible. Before it can adopt a positive voice, freedom requires an effort at disalienation [...] Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? (1967:231) (Kane, p. 358).

Fanon’s vision of a world lacking hierarchy and socially constructed division requires two-sided movement. Both the oppressed and the oppressor must be conscious of their roles in creating divisions and be willing to exchange positions. No matter what their education and consciousness, the oppressed cannot create change alone. Could universities offer settings to practice Fanon’s belief that individuals can move between the polarized worlds of the white majority and the oppressed minority? Can institutions help white students’ abilities to navigate their own dominant culture?

Fanon (1961), Cross (1971), and Radhakrishnan (2003) provide guidance for the role of the host culture, in this case the majority white institutes of higher education. For Cross, the goal of identity development resides in understanding and appreciating experiences that are different from one’s own. Cross’s work brings the question, if students arrive in a stage ready to reject white culture, can colleges navigate supporting the development of healthy identity in the black diaspora members while still supporting cross-cultural understanding among white and black students? Radhakrishnan (2003) reminds us that effective identity development occurs under conditions “that do not privilege the ‘national’ at the expense of the ‘ethnic’” (Radhakrishnan, p. 121). This seems the most difficult aspect to accomplish in institutions where white people have traditionally been privileged (McIntosh, 1998). Fanon (1961) also warns against privileging one group over another. He argues

the challenge facing any movement that is dismantling colonialism (or a system in which one culture dominates another) is to provide for a new order that does not reproduce the social structure of the old system [...] must avoid
simple assimilation to the dominant culture’s roles and positions by the emergent group (Lowe, p. 143).

Any new order must stop the practices of domination of one group over another.

The narrators offer guidance for Fanon’s two-sided movement. Susanna illustrates the importance of advocacy by the majority culture when she speaks to a friend’s inaction against racism, “the fact that she did not speak out against it [racism] and befriended those who espoused it, made her just as guilty as the most vocal members” (Garrod, p. 144). She continues that there “are some things that they [white friends] refuse to hear or believe” (Garrod, p. 145). Liz’s second school allowed Liz to experience some of Cross’s final stage where minorities can define and build their desired world. Liz was allowed to “feel that I could be excellent at some things and poor at others. Being black had nothing to do with my strengths and weaknesses” (Garrod, p. 118). Susanna recognizes

what I can and do expect is that the other person does not dismiss my reactions as insignificant. I expect to be taken seriously and for them to at least try to understand my point of view. In return, I give them the same respect (Garrod, p. 145).

Further complicating issues in higher education institutions, the outcome, not the intention, of policies is important; if outcomes produce systematic exclusions on the basis of racial groups, good intentions are irrelevant (Anthias, 2010). Ivy League institutions are often places where the social system “is generally elitist, exclusionary and unwilling to cater for the minority” (Lai & Maclean, p. 88), leading to institutional racism or the “existence of systemic, pervasive and habitual policies and practices that have the effect of systematically disadvantaging certain racialized groups” (Delanty, Wodak, & Jones, p. 5). Susanna spoke to pervasive racism in her college experience,

the college I attended was full of people who are, in various ways, racist. Outward, blatant racists are in the minority
but they do exist and in some cases thrive at that school. More common are those who don't even recognize their own ignorance. I met administrators, faculty and students who fall into this category. From my first day until my very last class, I came across this ignorance (Garrod, p. 146).

By allowing racism and “othering” by race, both the institution and the students lose. “The impact of racism is felt by everyone; racists, its victims and bystanders” (Schuster, p. 347). New configurations should move beyond merely requiring tolerance and establishing positive recognition of differences (Delanty, Wodak, & Jones, 2008).

Fanon is hopeful—“he envisions a world where it is possible for both the white and black man to become ‘disalienated’” (Kane, p. 359). However, Fanon’s hopefulness confronts the fact that “honest dialog about race between racially different peoples does not often take place” (Robinson, p. 89). For Fanon’s hope that “one’s geographical, class, and race need not make one’s situation as the oppressor/oppressed inevitable. Those living in more privileged sectors can become conscious, responsible, and subversive” (Kane, p. 359), to become reality, higher education must acknowledge and accommodate the difficulties surrounding honest, helpful discourse around race. Peggy McIntosh (1988) identifies 50 ways she is privileged over minorities in her article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Acknowledgment by whites of these invisible privileges may help create more productive and respectful dialog among the majority and minority cultures in a college setting.

The kicker, of course, is that this crystal clear picture of Dartmouth’s deep-seated racism never quite seems to come into focus, no matter how far we step back. From the protesters, we hear anecdotes about insensitive party themes, and reminders of our lack of black professors. And of course, these issues fit into the broader context of a school characterized by historical wealth and whiteness, which can make students from other backgrounds
feel forlorn outside the cultural mainstream. (An editorial about the “Black Lives Matter” protest of November 12, 2015 in the November 14, 2015 Dartmouth Review)

Perhaps higher education will lead the world to a place where “all people, regardless of identity, can exert their agency in ways that break down the false binaries that oppress and make life difficult and unbearable for many,” (Kane, p. 360) making Fanon’s hopefulness reality.

This was adapted from a longer paper for MALS 346: Diasporas and Migrations Spring Term 2016.


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Lauren Glass
TRANSPARENT:
A CLOSER LOOK AT THE TRANSGENDER TIPPING POINT
Brittany Murphy

I WILL BE investigating the representation of queer bodies and family structures in the first season of the new television series *Transparent*. I would also like to analyze, using Sara Ahmed’s theory of objects and orientations, the unhappy queer and how the family itself circulates as a “happy object.” Bringing together Ahmed’s texts into conversation with one another will allow me to dissect an immensely powerful television series that I believe will have a lasting impact concerning the way of imagined futures for queer narratives. I will also touch on concepts and alternative theories proposed by Jack Halberstam*. As the show is receiving mass acclaim and attention in both queer and non-queer communities, I think it is important to ask critical questions about what the show is representing and what it isn’t, investigating the negative area in a popular culture medium that is cleverly aware of the space it is occupying on Amazon Prime’s Instant Video. I argue that the show has emerged at this particular junction because of the way transgender issues are surfacing in the media and in popular culture. The creator of *Transparent*, Jill Soloway is asking for a trans presence in the show, pushing for a “transfirmative action program;” employing trans folks in myriad roles. By hiring transgender producers as consultants for the series, the show is attempting to make room for trans voices in a space that has been historically void of them. However, it is important to note that the lead star is not a trans woman, and this is a point of contention for many. Soloway’s father is transgender; and this was an experience that allowed for the innovation and creation of this refreshing and original series that grapples with complex issues of identity and family, while still managing to make them accessible.
The series centers around the lives of Maura Pfefferman, her ex-wife Shelly, and their three children Sarah, Josh, and Ali. *Transparent* uses an aesthetic space to complicate depictions of marginalized bodies in our contemporary moment.

Queer theory is a relatively new field of inquiry that arose in the 1990s. Though largely contested at its origin, queer theory has become a framework in which to understand the incongruities of the politics of desire, orientation, biological sex, and even issues of cross-dressing. Queer theory aims to confront non-normative behaviors and their productions, usually in the sphere of sexuality or gender. Annamarie Jagose wrote *Queer Theory: An Introduction* in 1996. Almost twenty years have passed since the book’s publication, yet it circulates as an amazing primer for the understanding of queer theory. Jagose explains in her introduction, “As queer is unaligned with any specific identity category, it has the potential to be annexed profitably to any number of discussions.” (Jagose:1996 2) Though Jagose seems to be analyzing a freedom associated with queer theory, during the time the book was written many academics argued that queer theory was losing its queerness by becoming an academic discipline and in some cases its efficacy.

*Transparent* is a series that constructs its main characters on the binary between male and female. However, through dialogue, particular actions, relationships as well as interactions with queer characters, we can understand how looking through a queer theoretical lens can prove to be quite useful when deconstructing this rich and layered narrative. The scholarship in queer theory has changed dramatically since Jagose’s book was written in 1996. I believe that is due in part to the shift in our contemporary social moment and emergence of new discourses that situate queer bodies within a more mainstream purview rather than a fixed pathologized state.

Jill Soloway has embarked on something not yet seen before in critically acclaimed television; she created a show where the main character is transgender and is actively transitioning. Jack Halberstam* elucidates that in transgender cinema there are particular ways the viewer is meant to position the trans body. Halberstam explains we must use “rewind” if the character is first shown as passing as cis-gender and then fails. Another strategy is the use of “formal techniques” to influence the viewer to look with the character rather
than “at” the character. “Doubling” and “ghosting” are also implemented to have the erased trans character replaced by narration or another trans body.¹ (Halberstam:2005 78) *Transparent* asks the viewer to look with Maura, but the persistent flashbacks do not allow us to categorize this show into any of Halberstam’s prescriptive molds. The main character Maura is played by Jeffrey Tambor, a cis-gender, white man. Soloway has received plenty of push back from members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as individuals who do not identify as LGBTQ+ for not casting a transgender woman. Soloway’s father came out to her as transgender a little over four years ago. In an interview for Out, an online magazine, Soloway tells interviewer Michelle Ehrhardt that the show is not purely autobiographical, but it does draw on her personal experiences. In many interviews and articles written about Soloway’s motives for the show, she speaks of implementing a “transfirmative action program” where she prefers to hire people identifying as transgender rather than cisgender folks. She has also hired two transgender consults to help her address trans issues with a more authentic voice, hopefully avoiding major faux pas that could arise as the result of having a cisgender lead. (Ehrhardt)

Hiring transgender consults and people studying transgender issues to help writers is something that seems to be on the rise. As Caitlyn Jenner recently came out on television with Diane Sawyer, it was no accident that there were a list of terms flashing on the back of the screen providing definitions to words such as transgender, sex, gender, sexual orientation, etc. I have often wondered about the preparation that goes into an interview such as the one done by Jenner and Sawyer. Susan Stryker is from the University of Arizona, a professor in the Gender and Women’s Studies Department and an active transgender scholar and activist since the 90s. In an interview for The AWL, Stryker talks about the preparation that went into the Jenner/Sawyer interview. Stryker explains, “I worked closely with one of the associate producers on everything from what to read to prep Sawyer for the interview, sources for archival media, how questions should be framed, who to call on for talking-head commentary, and who might make good test-audience members. Of course, in the end they made their own decisions, regardless of what I suggested.” (Pasulka) What Stryker was participating in was helping the media construct a representation of Jenner, Sawyer, and the depiction of transgender
issues in America. It is very important to be aware of the fact that what appears on screen is not a single story of what is being depicted. It is also just as important to understand that the meaning being constituted is not entirely dependent upon what is being represented, people attribute meaning to images, words and actions.

Stryker has also been instrumental in the critique and careful analysis to the first season of *Transparent*. I would like to examine what Susan Stryker surveys in her critique titled, *The New Trans Landscape*, "Where *Transparent* might fit into this new ecology of transgender media representation when its second season starts later this year is anybody’s guess, but let’s hope the writers have a crystal ball, or the budget for rewrites, if their intent is to keep current, or to get ahead of the curve.” (Susan Stryker, publicbooks.org) In her article Stryker makes it painfully clear that the first season of *Transparent* was written and produced in a B.J. period (Before Jenner), and now we have a rise of transgender stories in the media, new television shows addressing transgender narratives in an entirely different way such as *Sense8* streaming on Netflix, as well as celebrity documentaries and reality TV dramas. Stryker also addresses the way we can see microaggressions play out on screen and how those verbal acts may indeed be as or more dangerous than blatant physical transphobia. She explains, “One’s being trans should not authorize the bad behavior of others. I worry that leaving unchallenged the many microaggressions directed at Maura by members of her own family can subtly perpetuate the broader cultural assumption that casually mistreating trans people verbally and emotionally is socially normal, that we somehow ask for it simply by being trans, or that we deserve it. Experiencing such things is a consequence of structural transphobia—not the bash-your-head-in-and-leave-you-dead-in-a-dumpster variety of transphobia, but the more banal and quotidian forms of oppression through which the sociopolitical relegation of an entire category of people to conditions that render them more vulnerable to diminished life and premature death plays out, often unconsciously and unwittingly, at the level of interpersonal interaction. All the goodwill and sympathy in the world toward trans people doesn’t interrupt the circulation of that often lethal power through actual conduct.” (Stryker, publicbooks.org) As Stryker concludes her poignant article on *Transparent* she leaves us with a recommendation that asks
us to be conscientious and hyper-aware for season two. “I wish it were more trans-centric in its perspective, rather than using a trans character primarily as a device through which non-trans people get to relate to each other; that risks producing another sort of ‘transparency’ altogether, one that erases the actual conditions of trans lives.” (Stryker, publicbooks.org)

I believe that using Sara Ahmed’s text, The Promise of Happiness and Queer Phenomenology, will provide an interesting framework in which to unpack the complexities of the characters and their interactions with one another in Transparent. I am primarily concerned with the “Happy Object,” the “Unhappy Queer,” and the “Promise” in the text The Promise of Happiness and “Orientations” in the text Queer Phenomenology. I will give a brief account of the terms I plan to use and then explain how I see them functioning in the TV series. Most of the meaty unpacking falls inside the dialogue of the show, however there are a few hallmark scenes where the place, time, and actions are extremely important to my analysis.

Ahmed wrote these two texts only four years apart and I believe that the first text Queer Phenomenology was the groundwork for The Promise of Happiness, which allowed for an intimate analysis of popular culture artifacts. In her text Ahmed describes that our lives are an accumulation of objects, but we must remember that our bodies can never be in a state of neutrality. Ahmed explains, “If bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation.” (Ahmed:2010 40) Affect essentially coats our bodies, and just as our bodies are not affectively neutral they are also not equal in terms of treatment from others, systemically and socially. Not all bodies are promised the same kind of happiness. Meaning that as a white, cisgender woman that passes as heterosexual I am promised a different kind of happiness than a white cisgender man or queer woman of color. Ahmed explains happiness as such, “In particular, I will explore how happiness functions as a promise that directs us toward certain objects, which then circulate as social goods. Such objects accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around. My essay will offer an approach to thinking through affect as “sticky.” Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.” (Ahmed: 2010 21) So what objects are considered ‘Happy Objects’
and why are they important to explore? The wedding ring can be considered a happy object because with it comes the promise of marriage and historically with marriage comes the promise of your arrival as a productive heterosexual member of society. Until very recently, June 26th, 2015 marriage wasn’t promised to both heterosexual and homosexual U.S. citizens, yet it was still considered the ‘Happy Object’ to aspire to because with marriage follows children and the ability to situate yourself within a heteronormative nuclear family, facilitating the deceptive “American Dream”. “The family, for example, is a happy object, one that binds and is binding.” (Ahmed:2010 45) Transparent centers around the family, specifically the way Maura’s three adult children deal with her coming out as transgender. I believe that Maura is simultaneously trying to continue to orient and align herself towards her family as a happy object while her families’ treatment towards her is what positions her as the ‘Unhappy Queer’. “To inherit the family is to inherit the demand to reproduce its form. The family also becomes a pressure point, as being necessary for a good or happy life, which in turn is how we achieve a certain orientation toward something and not others as good.” (Ahmed: 2010 46) The ‘Unhappy Queer’ functions on a basis of conditionality that Ahmed speaks to at length. She explains, “You can become unhappy because you are attributed as the cause of unhappiness.” (Ahmed: 2010 95) Essentially people are not unhappy that they are queer they are unhappy that people are upset they are queer, and that their actions have become the cause of someone else’s (usually families) unhappiness. Susan Stryker’s cogent critiques of the show illustrate this quite well. Maura’s family is continuously misgendering her, questioning her identity and placing her in a context comfortable for them, not her. When Josh, Maura’s only son states, “Whatever people do behind closed doors”, Maura replies “Oh behind closed doors…” making it painfully obvious that Josh is upset with how Maura is expressing her gender identity and wants her to essentially closet herself, forcing Maura into the space of the unhappy queer. (“Wedge”) What truly ties these texts together is ‘Orientations’, how we are drawn to objects and others based on the way we are oriented toward them. For Ahmed, “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as “who” or “what we direct our energy and attention toward.” (Ahmed: 2006 3) Ahmed is concerned
with sexual orientation as well as what objects we turn toward, and how they
direct and situate our bodies. *Transparent* allows us to follow Maura through
her transition and provides us a window into her past through flashbacks to
the year 1994 where her active transition begins and where she starts to grapple
with existing as the unhappy queer while continuing to closet her identity
in order to keep her family as the as happy object. Maura continues to insist
through her actions that she was unhappy performing as male and she will
now be happy because she can express her female identity. Here she is uti-
lizing Ahmed’s idea of the “Promise”. Ahmed explains that you have to do
something to get to the happy place, happiness is “end oriented”. Maura has
to change her gender identity in order to become actualized and happy. As she
transitions she tries to surround herself with happy objects, women’s cloth-
ing, new desires for make-up, estrogen and of course her family. At the mall
Maura tells the sales associate giving her a makeover, “I should buy a great
many of these products.” (“Moppa”) “The promising nature of happiness sug-
gests happiness lies ahead of us, at least if we do the right thing. To promise
after all is to make the future into an object, into something that can be de-
clared in advance of its arrival.” (Ahmed:2010 29) So if Maura does the right
things and consumes the right happy objects than she too can become happy.
Ahmed explains in *Queer Phenomenology* that the kitchen table is a “kinship
object”, she goes on to explain, “The kitchen table “supports” the family gather-
ering by providing a surface “on” which “we” can do things.” (Ahmed:2006
81) In *Transparent* the house becomes the “kinship object” or happy object
that touches other objects and makes them happy by association, this is where
the “stickiness” of affect and orientation begins, the house turns the family
towards one another by giving them a place to congregate. The house is a
vessel that literally houses the family members, their memories, and their pos-
sessions. Sarah, Maura’s eldest daughter lets the house be her sanctuary from
her listless heterosexual marriage to Len, a place where she brings Tammy
(her new promise of happiness). Josh stores his photos of Rita (his childhood
babysitter and incidentally lover) in the house and utilizes it to make money
and pick up women. The house is even where Shelly, Maura’s ex wife decides
to have her current husbands Shiva. Ahmed speaks about the table the same
way I view the house, “The shared orientation towards the table allows the
family to cohere as a group, even when we do different things “at” the table.” (Ahmed:2006 81) The house orients the family towards one another and keeps the family together and at the center of the narrative.

Though the dialogue is where most of the interaction happens in Transparent, there is a scene that I want to examine at length. The bathroom scene illustrates a struggle that many transgender individuals face on a daily basis while navigating public spaces. Using the restroom when you are in the process of transitioning or not is not only uncomfortable but can be extremely dangerous and can also result in legal action. “This is the ladies” Sarah says to Maura as they are about the enter the women’s restroom at the crowded mall. Maura hesitates and says “Ok, I think I’m...” And as we assume she is about to say, “I’m fine” Sarah pulls her in and says, “Come on it’s ok.”. Ali the younger daughter trails behind them, with a look of irritation, partly because she anticipates what’s waiting for them on the other side of the door and partly because she is recovering from a night of illicit drug use. The anxiety is palpable as Maura tries to make herself blend into the wall while two teenagers question whether Maura is in fact a woman. The tension is broken by the hostility of the teens mother who starts in on Maura asking her, “Excuse me? Are you a man? Because this is a ladies’ restroom.” Before Maura can respond (though it doesn’t look like she will) Sarah interjects and states, “We are aware what it is thank you, thank you. We’re good.”. The rude woman continues on as if Sarah wasn’t speaking, calling Maura sir and asking if she can hear her. As the bickering goes on between Sarah and the woman something is produced in the words being exchanged. Sarah is explaining that her father has every right to be in the bathroom but the woman disagreeing is stating that isn’t the case because Maura is a man and she is traumatizing her daughters with her very presence. The camera pans to Ali and we see a glimpse of her face through a crack in the stall, her anticipatory fears are quickly becoming a reality and though she seems upset about what is happening to Maura she seems more upset she herself is being inconvenienced. In the parking lot all the Pfefferman women go their separate ways and Sarah asks Maura if she is going to be ok? Maura shrugs her off muttering, “eventually”. We then see almost voyeuristically Maura stopping on the side of the road to use a construction site Porta-Potty. (“Moppa”) The bathroom scene is so important because in just two
minutes we are faced with a clear example of how some bodies can easily pass through certain spaces and others cannot. This is where orientation can really be dissected. Lauren Berlant explains in *The Female Complaint* comparing bodies that pass with bodies that don’t, “But they share more than this in that they mutually usurp the privilege white Americans have to assume free passage within any public space they can afford to lease or own—such as a taxicab, a table in a restaurant, rooms in a hotel, a private home.” (Berlant:2008) Some bodies are promised safe passage because of their privilege, Maura is aware she is no longer in that category. When Maura was preforming as Mort she could access many spaces her body will no longer permit her to move through, she is orienting herself towards a body that exposes its harsh limits.

As I have stated before, the dialogue between the characters is where the true story takes place. Language is an amazing way to subtly propel action. When speaking about gender, identity, and orientation, language is crucial and the way you use it matters. After Sarah and her current/former lesbian flame Tammy, are caught by Maura who really has no choice but to come out to Sarah because she is dressed in women’s clothing, Tammy immediately uses female pronouns; Sarah however, laughs. Though I’m not sure its totally apparent one can assume that Tammy starts using the correct pronouns because she is more intimately involved with the LGBTQ+ community and also because she is not Maura’s daughter. (“The Letting Go”) The language Tammy uses begins a process of orientating Maura in Sarah’s mind, structuring her thought. Sarah learns of her fathers transition a few episodes before her younger sister Ali does but it doesn’t take Sarah long to go from shock to support. When Ali tells Sarah she wants to tell Josh (and inevitably does anyway) that Maura is transgender Sarah stops her and says, “Outing a trans person is like an act of violence”, insinuating the speech act actually insights violence. (“Moppa”) After all the children learn of Maura’s transition and are walking across the pond, a scene that closely resembles “Abbey Road” referring to their father Josh asks, “So Wait, does this mean he’s gay?” Sarah playfully replies “No he still likes women” and Ali both solemnly and curtly says, “Well technically that does make him a lesbian.” (“Wedge”) The three are interrogating Maura’s identity categories, trying to make intelligible her queer body and its orientation(s).
As we have seen the evolution of queer theory in the last 20 or so years, we have seen new narratives for queer individuals. We see a cultural landscape that seems to be rapidly changing; but it seems to be only changing for a few. There is much to celebrate in way of productive queer visibility, with Janet Mock activist and writer publishing, *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, the positive attention Caitlyn Jenner is receiving from myriad demographics (not just millennials), and Laverne Cox winning countless awards for her role in *Orange is the New Black*. We still have a tragically long road ahead; legislators are trying to pass “Bathroom Bills” making it nearly impossible for some trans folk to use public restrooms. There are countless murders and police brutality of trans women of color daily that seem to slip out of mainstream media attention, and spaces that center around reproductive rights are not nearly as inclusive as they could be.

*Transparent* is a cultural artifact that will be discussed in media studies circles, gender studies conversations, and within the walls of academia for years to come. Analyzing this brilliant television series allowed me to bring together media studies, popular culture, and queer theory, making applicable practical illustrations of the way affect operates in television. Using Ahmed’s theories to deconstruct carefully crafted dialogue helped to hone a particular type of media literacy regarding transgender narratives. *Transparent* simultaneously tells one story of Maura while also making space for numerous transgender voices through the writing and producing by several transgender folks. Soloway is conscientious and bold in her portrayal of the Pfeffermans, and aims to use practical wisdom in the way she cast, wrote, and produced this incredible series that absolutely adds to the conversation about the questionable “Transgender Tipping Point.”
WORKS CITED

NOTES

1. See Judith Halberstam’s pages 77 & 78 for a more comprehensive overview of the trans body in cinema.


Cultural Studies


Brittany Murphy
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Photography

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