

# WR

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

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When students arrive at the university, they enter *in medias res*—that is, they confront a multitude of disciplines and discourses with long, complex histories and are asked immediately to participate in pushing them forward. Boston University, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the CAS Writing Program are all charged with helping students become civically minded thinkers who will use the knowledge and experiences they acquire in their undergraduate years to make a difference in their fields and communities. This goal is made immediately apparent to students in their writing classes, in which they must take stock of both inherited traditions and cutting-edge theories and use (and at times revise) these methods in order to interpret past and/or current events, debates, and cultural representations. Here in Issue 6, in which we've published eleven superb essays from a pool of 430, you'll see how the best writing asks readers to see things differently.

In essays written for WR 100, Morgan Barry and Patrick Allen interpret cultural forms we're familiar with—television, literature and film—in order to get at bigger questions, but they do so in compellingly contrasting ways. In “What’s Out of Sight Is Not Out of Mind,” Barry drills down into a handful of moments in the landmark television series *The Sopranos* to show us how the soundtrack picks up on the show’s discourse about psychoanalysis. Conversely, in “The Dichotomy of Science” Allen zooms out, using the figure of the mad scientist to place two timelines—one literary, one scientific—side by side. Both approaches allow these writers to contribute to and open up interdisciplinary lines of inquiry. Jamie Tam and Ryan Lader also ask us to see things differently, but they

do so by offering a more complex understanding of context. In “Beyond Beneficence,” Tam lends historical context to our understanding of past medical practices, compelling readers to consider current ethical debates in a similar way. And in “The Artist Is Present and the Emotions Are Real,” Lader provides theoretical context for analyzing a recent piece of performance art, showing readers how theoretical engagement can facilitate readings of all sorts of cultural forms, complicating and even overturning our initial assumptions.

In WR 150, students continue to put these methods to use, but their essays are enriched with in-depth independent research. Again, the exceptional student writers whose essays are featured here strive not only to interpret specific evidence persuasively, but also use these interpretations to propel new understandings of the world. In these essays, students are even more active participants in the revision and creation of discourses, making adjustments, filling holes, and even proposing new work to be done. Carly Sitrin writes back to dismissive scholars in “Making Sense: Decoding Gertrude Stein,” addressing a challenging body of work with clarity and purpose; Thomas Laverriere recovers an overlooked theme in “Cross-dressing in Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion*,” reinvigorating the conversation on an iconic film by bringing recent scholarship to bear in his fresh interpretation; and Andrea Foster deploys an alternative genre “Crossbones” to propose a nautical excavation that could have far-reaching implications.

While many of the best essays set out to solve problems, others do the work of raising new sets of questions. Nicholas Supple and Laura Coughlin use their research to question the assumptions behind contemporary political movements. In “That Ayn’t Rand,” Supple responds to the loud voice of a popular political commentator by questioning uses and misuses of major socioeconomic theories, while, in “Fitting Animal Liberation into Conceptions of American Freedom,” Coughlin uncovers the root of failed attempts made by animal activist groups in their foundational rhetorical approaches. Julie Hammond and Hannah Pangrcic raise questions that are, in a way, about how we raise questions. Hammond’s “Eusociality” worries about questions raised in disciplinary isolation, calling for more collaboration across fields. And Pangrcic’s “Borat” takes a level approach to a highly charged and controversial documentary, raising questions about the very definition of the term.

Each of these essays has been selected because the writer has taken a risk and followed through with confidence. The essays span disciplines and at times even question disciplinary boundaries. These students arrive in the middle of things, but they write to move us forward—not just for the sake of it, but with a clear sense of purpose, with an eye to the future.

— Gwen Kordonowy, Editor

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## From the Instructor

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This was Patrick Allen's final paper for a WR 100 course titled "The Mad Scientist in Literature and Film." In the course, we traced the long history of the mad scientist figure from myths and legends which tell of the religious transgressions of the "overreacher" to more recent stories and their added urgency due to the potentially destructive power of new technologies. We saw that there are many types of mad scientist, whose stories raise different social and philosophical questions, but we found that common themes emerge, especially questions concerning the ethics of research and invention and a consideration of humanity's place in nature.

Patrick made quick progress as a writer over the semester, and this essay demonstrates his increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure, and his insightful analyses. Though the scope of the essay is perhaps overly ambitious, there is a logic behind it. He begins with Frankenstein, arguably the first major modern mad scientist, who creates a man, then moves to the industrial age with Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, in which men are mass produced, and ends with Dr. Strangelove, of the military-industrial complex, where it is mad politicians and generals who wield the power of technology. Across this line of modern development, Patrick both identifies a type of cultural anxiety that lies behind mad scientist stories, whereby the promise of science can inspire both hope and discontent, and considers what happens when the utopian motives of mad scientists themselves come up against the paradoxes inherent in knowledge, freedom, and, as the word implies, utopia.

— Andrew Christensen

WR 100: The Mad Scientist in Literature and Film

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## From the Writer

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“The Dichotomy of Science” is the final product of my work in my WR 100 seminar, “The Mad Scientist in Film and Literature.” The purpose of this paper was to develop an interpretive argument on the topic of mad scientist figures.

I at first grappled with settling on a thesis for this project, considering the broad scope of both the prompt and the source material. From Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* to Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*, there seemed to be an endless number of directions in which to begin my writing. Should I focus on the hubris of these men and women? Should I argue that they were victims of society’s scorn? These questions proved early roadblocks in my writing process.

In order to decide how best to craft a thoughtful argument, I went back to what inspired me to take this course in the first place. Growing up, I loved watching the old black and white movies that breathed life into the pages of Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson. Seeing the lightning flashes illuminate Doctor Frankenstein’s laboratory in the 1931 Universal Pictures masterpiece or Doctor Jekyll’s first transformation before the mirror in Rouben Mamoulian’s film of the same year still amazes me to this day. I chose to take this seminar in order to learn more about these characters with whom I grew up, to delve into their long literary histories which extend much farther back than the silver screen.

Over the span of the course, I learned how these mad scientists were truly complex characters. None of them fit the bill for the maniacal madman hell-bent on ruling the world. Rather, I found each of them was caught up in the utopias they envisioned as a result of scientific progress. I thus found the central argument for my final paper.

Looking back on this piece, I wonder if I could have made a more convincing argument had I devoted the entirety of the paper to one specific work. I feel I sacrifice depth in my argument in favor of breadth. However, I am nonetheless pleased with my work and I am glad that I can introduce the figure of the mad scientist to a larger audience.

— Patrick Allen



PATRICK ALLEN

## THE DICHOTOMY OF SCIENCE

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Science has a dual nature. It can uplift and entice us with promises of a better tomorrow, free from disease and tedium, and often follow through with tangible technological and medical improvements. Such a bright future guaranteed by advancement in scientific knowledge can also be a source of anxiety and despair, as it only sheds more harsh light on the dim realities of the present. How, then, does the figure of the mad scientist fit in to this spectrum of science's influence? The answer: not easily. The mad scientist has served many roles throughout his long literary trajectory, from the swindling alchemist to the misguided father. Such various roles attest to the broad range of meanings which science, in general, can be said to hold. The mad scientist is a caricature of the fear concerning unrestricted learning. However, his image becomes clearer when his own motives are examined alongside his work and creations. Most "mad" scientists are not truly maniacs because they are bent on destruction and world domination, but rather they, too, are caught up in this duality of scientific research. Thus, the appearance and use of the mad scientist symbol, specifically in the works of Mary Shelley, Karel Čapek, and Stanley Kubrick allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the fascinations and apprehensions of humanity are tapped by science, as its approach to a perfect society only makes the distance to such a goal all the more apparent.

According to Roslynn Haynes, in her article "The Alchemist in Fiction: The Master Narrative," the "master narrative concerning science and scientists is about fear—fear of specialized knowledge and the power that knowledge confers on the few, leaving the majority of the population ignorant and therefore impotent" (5). She suggests that the "typical"

mad scientist scenario has the deranged megalomaniac threatening the planet and, eventually, failing to follow through with his plans, leading to a “memory of disempowerment” among the general populace to be recalled each time a new scientific breakthrough is achieved. Furthermore, Christopher Toumey affirms, “The mad scientist stories of fiction and film are homilies on the evil of science” (1). Thus, Haynes and Toumey argue that fear and suspicion characterize our fascination with science in literature. Yet, fear alone is not enough to sustain some five hundred years of longevity enjoyed by the idea of the mad scientist, beginning with the legend of Doctor Faustus. Behind these mad scientist and alchemist figures lies a distinct sense of optimism, which likewise intrigues and captivates audiences. Best described by Haynes in *From Faust to Strangelove*, mad scientists, specifically Victor Frankenstein, are “the heirs of Baconian optimism and Enlightenment confidence that everything can ultimately be known and that such knowledge will inevitably be for the good” (94). Indeed, the protagonist of Mary Shelley’s 1818 Gothic masterpiece provides a good starting point from which to launch an examination into how the mad scientist’s work is not solely characterized by vain or arrogant desires, but rather deeply ingrained personal convictions and visions of a better tomorrow.

Victor Frankenstein’s fascination with science and subsequent transformation as a result of these pursuits are testaments to the metamorphic power of science. The young Genovese initially dabbles in scientific investigation with moderation. He reads the works of Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Albertus Magnus, and their writings appeared to him as “treasures known to few beside [himself]” (21). He is fascinated by his foray into the sciences, but he is careful not to throw himself headlong into the venture. He explains:

The human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or transitory desire to disturb his tranquility. I do not think the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. (34)

To think that such wise advice against the overindulgence in intellectual endeavors originates from one of the most prominent representations of the mad scientist serves as a chilling reminder of the enticing power of science.

Once he finds a companion and soul mate in the form of Elizabeth, Frankenstein notes, "I was capable of a more intense application, and was more deeply smitten with a thirst for knowledge" (18). His devotion to science is motivated by ostensibly noble reasons. Disillusioned by the death of his mother at the hands of scarlet fever, Frankenstein vows to "banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death" (22). To achieve this end, Frankenstein sets forth to answer the question, "Whence . . . did the principle of life proceed?" (30). Frankenstein's first error, perhaps, is best described as falling into the paradox elaborated upon by Haynes: "the pursuit of freedom through knowledge" (99). "The more Frankenstein learns, the more aware he is of his own ignorance" (99), and he isolates himself from those whom he loves as the thirst for knowledge intoxicates him. He seeks to flush out and discover the essence of life, but his attempts to unlock such secrets, although successful in some sense due to the creation of his monster, leave him more disillusioned with life.

The more that Victor Frankenstein learns, the more aware he is of his own shortcomings. When he first arrives at the University of Ingolstadt, he meets with the professor of natural philosophy there, M. Krempe. When the disgruntled teacher questions Frankenstein on his scientific background and hears of his devout readings of the likes of Cornelius Agrippa and Albertus Magnus, he lambasts him, "Every minute. . . every instant you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and useless names" (26). Because of this encounter, Frankenstein is understandably disheartened, having his entire repertoire of knowledge brushed aside, and he is all the more incited to the cause of learning.

Furthermore, Victor's advancements with regard to instilling the spark of life into inanimate objects likewise only lead him to the realization that it is impossible to truly create a human being with empathy and rationality. Despite the fact that he had chosen only the most "beautiful" parts and features to create his monster, his heart is filled with "breath-

less horror and disgust” (35) at the sight of his creation rising up from the floor. Science seems to fail Frankenstein at the moment when he should stand triumphant due to his success. Frankenstein emerges from the hazy stupor of his scientific work to discover that he has created something so unnatural as to horrify him and make him regret all of the sleep-deprived and isolated hours he spent in laboratories and morgues. The reasoning behind his disgust with his monster can best be explained by Philip Ball, in his book *Unnatural: The Heretical Act of Making People*. Since “the ‘natural’ end of sex is procreation . . . the natural and therefore the only permissible beginning of procreation is sex” (18). Frankenstein fails to recognize this basic human reaction to “playing God” because he is so caught up with the possibilities that the ability to instill life into inanimate objects might grant. However, untold suffering at the hands of his monster shatters his vision of a better future.

The same disillusionment arising from science’s failure to live up to its high expectations can be seen in Karel Čapek’s 1920 science fiction drama *R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots)*. The protagonists of the play, Rossum and Domin, both foresee a world where robots are diffuse and cheap, allowing for humanity to exchange unstimulating daily toil for a life of pleasure and happiness. As Domin passionately explains to his colleagues as his robot operation collapses around him and his life hangs in the balance, “I wanted man to become a master! So he wouldn’t have to live from hand to mouth! I didn’t want to see another soul grow numb slaving over someone else’s machines. I wanted there to be nothing, nothing, nothing left of that damned social hierarchy” (54). Such a vision for a paradise on earth, where man no longer has to endure his punishment set out in the Book of Genesis, certainly testifies to the hope instilled by scientific advances. Though Rossum’s robots do indeed become widespread and allow for a greater amount of leisure time, they eventually become so advanced that they are able to stage a global, violent revolution. The future envisioned by Čapek more obviously shows how science can be uplifting yet terrifying.

Domin’s dream is a utopia of “supermen,” but the reality that follows the scientific breakthroughs is a world where humans are hunted to the last and exterminated. The world envisioned by Domin is “unnatural,” as the newly created robots do not have souls. The widespread belief out-

lined by Philip Ball that “The ‘artificial person’ has no soul” (7) may seem antiquated, but it nonetheless influences how the public feels about the robots. For example, Nana exclaims to Helena, “Out of Satanic pride you dared take upon yourselves the task of Divine creation. It’s impiety and blasphemy to want to be like God” (32). Nana’s sentiment is characteristic of that of the general populace: that the ends do not necessarily justify the means. As much as the mad scientist attempts to break loose from archaic restrictions on what is deemed acceptable, he is still shackled by those parts of society that refuse to relinquish their old taboos. The prevalence of robots makes it apparent that society is not ready for the type of freedom granted by a seemingly infinite supply of manual labor. Sometimes, it is not a matter of how soon we can achieve a new technology, but rather of how soon the public can become ready for the type of world affected by the emergence of such new science.

A much more poignant example of how science can allure us into dreams of utopia comes in the example of Stanley Kubrick’s satirical depiction of the Cold War arms race. Kubrick’s envisioning of a world liberated by the horrors of conventional warfare by the rise of the atom bomb continues this theme of the dual nature of science. In his 1964 satirical film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Kubrick captures the Cold War era and the prevailing ideology of the time: mutually assured destruction, commonly abbreviated M.A.D. The leading chiefs of staff and think tanks of the time revel in the fact that conventional warfare is, for the most part, rendered useless thanks to the sheer destructive power and devastation afforded by the rise of the atom bomb and nuclear weapons. Dr. Strangelove explains to his colleagues the premise of the “doomsday device” within the war room:

That is the whole idea of this machine, you know. Deterrence is the art of producing in the mind of the enemy . . . the FEAR to attack. And so, because of the automated and irrevocable decision-making process which rules out human meddling, the Doomsday machine is terrifying and simple to understand . . . and completely credible and convincing.

D. H. Dowling, in his article “The Atomic Scientist: Machine or Moral-ist?” argues that Dr. Strangelove is the “apotheosis” (145) of mad science. Strangelove is, as Haynes noted, one of the paradoxical “heirs to Baconian

optimism” because, although he has devoted his life’s work developing technology designed only to destroy human life, he is utilizing this knowledge to actualize a society that enjoys a new, consummate peace.

What Dr. Strangelove referred to as a “fear to attack” has, in the eyes of the military and diplomatic strategists, given rise to a new, consummate type of peace. The citizens of those nations with nuclear capabilities are now free from the type of destruction caused by World War II and previous conflicts. However, rather than bringing about some form of new world order in which warfare has been rendered useless, a darker shadow now looms heavily over the minds of the global population: nuclear warfare. Once again, we see how our society is not yet ready for the freedom made possible by technological innovations.

A main focus of Kubrick’s satire in the film is the eradication of warfare as it was previously defined. Rendering older forms of warfare useless, ironically, has given rise to a tense situation in which the stakes are infinitely higher. At the turn of a key and the push of a button, humanity could bring about unparalleled death and destruction. Because of this, many of the chiefs of staff presented in this film take on the role of mad scientists, in a way, as they play fast and loose with weapons that could end all human life. General Buck Turgidson, played by George C. Scott, embodies this type of brazenness when he tries to justify the obliteration of millions of people to the president, played by Peter Sellers: “Mr. President, I’m not saying we wouldn’t get our hair mussed. But I do say no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops. Uh, depending on the breaks.”

The ending of the movie leaves the audience with another example of gallows humor, as science is exploited to gratify one of the most primitive of desires. The East-West conflict is planned to renew itself after the detonation of the atomic bomb upon the Russian test facility. The men, with no women present, as is typical considering the genre and setting of the film, discuss rival mineshafts, which must be necessary following the presence of radiation on the surface of earth. Dr. Strangelove, catering to the lustful appetites of the men in the war room explains: “But it is, you know, a sacrifice required for the future of the human race. I hasten to add that since each man will be required to do prodigious . . . service along these lines, the women will have to be selected for their sexual characteristics, which will have to be of a highly stimulating nature.” Mad scientists, too,

are only human, and Dr. Strangelove is forced to abase his work in order to ensure its success. In a uniquely masculine critique, Kubrick shows how science cannot progress unless it displays a clear and immediate appeal for the masses

The essence of the mad scientist genre of literature and, now, film is changing. The focal point of the work is no longer the mad scientist himself, but rather how his work caters to the hopes and fears held by the masses. This fact is perhaps a testament to how the scale of scientific research has grown: from the past, where a solitary man slaves away in his laboratory, pursuing his own dreams, to the present, where droves of research teams compile data and statistics at frightening speeds, eager to release new improvements to the public. The science practiced by all these knowledge-seekers carries with it the dreams of a utopian society made possible by technological improvements. Optimism characterizes such accumulation of knowledge, as it suggests that man has dominion over the world, the power to see the problems with society and improve them. However, the connotations of science do not stop there, with solely the benefits of possible research. Rather, the advancements of science likewise make the grim realities and shortcomings of the present all the more obvious, leading to renewed attempts to try and alleviate them, ad infinitum.

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## From the Instructor

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Morgan's study brings to conscious critical attention the deeper affective dimensions of *The Sopranos* subtly crafted in the interplay between the dominant level of the visual text and the more elusive dimensions effected through various auditory elements. Many viewers will have some conscious awareness of certain more obvious aspects of the soundtrack. So, as Nochimson points out, the contrast between the tough A2 gangster cut rolling through the credit sequence and the opening scene with Tony sitting in the cloistered silence of the psychoanalyst's waiting room is abrupt enough to be read more or less on the surface. So also is some of the narrative content of the lyrical associations playing out in apposition to overall episodes with rolling credits, or at times embedded as soundtrack accompaniment in specific scenes.

Morgan's analysis, however, goes beyond these relatively obvious juxtapositions to explore how not only the more overt narrative lyrical content reinforces narrative lines in the dramatic action, but also how more subtle aesthetic elements not only of sound, including animals, telephones, and other ambient elements, but even also of the absence of sound, as in the sessions with Melfi, play into the richly developed texture of the psychoanalytical process that sets *The Sopranos* apart from all that had preceded it in the genre. Morgan quite rightly detected how the layered mysteries of the psychoanalytic process playing out in Soprano's troubled and contradictory psychology are expressed through the subtle aesthetics of sound, and how specifically the various dynamics of sound serve not only to convey the un-, or sub-conscious processes unfolding in Soprano's psychoanalytic adventure, but also how they serve to engage unconscious mechanisms of our own sympathy with and in their suspension—revulsion at the monster within.

— Michael Degener

WR 100: Renaissance TV: Serial Drama and the Cable Revolution

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## From the Writer

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The idea for this paper began with a gasp-inducing epiphany while watching episode number five of *The Sopranos* series. This epiphany was born from the animal noises distracting Tony Soprano as he murders Fabian Petruccio and it evolved into the thesis described in this paper as more and more evidence of a relationship between sound and the theme of psychoanalysis became apparent to me. I originally submitted “What’s Out of Sight is Not Out of Mind” as my second paper for Professor Michael Degener’s WR 100 course, “Renaissance TV: Serial Drama and the Cable Revolution.” With the permission of Prof. Degener, the piece turned into my final paper because I felt I had so much more to explore on the subject of sound in *The Sopranos*. Thus, the paper grew in length and in range of thought, representing the culmination of my work in the WR 100 course.

Early on in watching the series, I noticed some interesting characteristics about the music in the show, most notably the fact that the music did not always seem to match the narrative content of the show, which brought me to pay close attention in my notes to the effect of the music. Thus, when Tony became briefly distracted at the subtle sounds of animal noises while killing Fabian Petruccio in episode number five my theory about the music began.

— Morgan Barry

## WHAT'S OUT OF SIGHT IS NOT OUT OF MIND: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOUND IN *THE SOPRANOS*

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It is difficult, after forging a relationship with the undeniably charming Tony Soprano, to watch him kill Fabian Petruccio. In watching his many therapy sessions, family dinners, and his often child-like behavior, we come to form an endearing image of Tony. It is thus all the more disturbing to watch this beloved yet tempestuous family man strangle another, who like Tony, is a father and husband too. We wince and grimace watching the victim's purpling face, his bulging veins and eyes, Tony's hands bleeding as they are cut by the wire around Fabian's throat ("College"). This image of Tony as a brutal killer is indelible. However, at this potent moment, there is a breach in Tony's brutal killer exterior. With his hands still firmly holding the cord around Petruccio's neck, Tony looks up, eyes flinching slightly, at the sound of an animal in the distance. In this moment, the subconscious Tony, that Tony possessed of a certain humanity and conscience, breaks through the monstrous exterior. The process of psychoanalysis, which is brought out in the narrative content of the show in Dr. Melfi's office, is thus augmented by the added effect of the auditory register. For Tony, what is out of sight is not out of mind, as *The Sopranos* uses the elements of sound, music, and silence as accompaniment to the unfolding of the psychoanalytical process in the show.

In the scene where Tony kills Fabian Petruccio, the ambient natural sounds of the auditory register serve to reiterate the psychoanalytic process in the show by lending an ear to Tony's thoughts as he commits the murder. We first see an incongruity between the auditory and the visual register when Tony looks up at the sound of animal in the woods as Petruccio mentions Tony's daughter Meadow ("College" 47:50). He looks up a sec-

ond time, distracted by the sound again, after “the rat” is silenced (49:00). The significance of Tony’s distraction at these sounds is then finally made obvious when he looks up a third time as the sounds of a telephone ringing and quacking ducks (which Tony sees flying overhead) are combined in an overlay together just before showing a close-up shot of Meadow’s face as she waits for her father. The use of sound in the scene seems to suggest that Tony is thinking of his family in this difficult moment.

The occasional incongruity between the visual and the auditory register intones multiple dichotomies in the show, highlighting particularly the contrasts between the conscious and the subconscious and the two sides of Tony Soprano. Although in the visual aspect Tony is murdering Fabian Petruccio, the distraction caused by and the significance of the sounds in the scene suggest Tony’s mind is somewhere else, a duality that resembles the process of psychoanalysis. Tony is first distracted by the animal sounds as Petruccio mentions his daughter, Meadow, who is waiting for him to rejoin her for a college tour. As he is leaving the scene of the murder, the sound of a ringing telephone plays in conjunction with the quacking ducks. Meadow reveals after Tony rejoins her that she had called their hotel room several times looking for him. This playing of the telephone thus connects the two in the auditory register despite their being in two different places on the level of conscious action, or the visual aspect. Similarly, we along with Tony are made to think of his family as the quacking ducks recall Tony’s association of a family of ducks with his own family in the first episode of the series. The contrast between what we hear versus what we see resonates with the process of psychoanalysis in that it demonstrates the complexity of Tony’s character. On the surface, to all appearances, Tony is a tough and powerful mob boss; the auditory elements, however, provide evidence that harkens to what lies within the subconscious beneath his tough exterior, which the audience has become accustomed to in watching Tony’s family interactions and therapy sessions.

This incongruity between the visual and the auditory registers is most distinctly played out in the scene with Fabian Petruccio. At the moment when Tony looks up at the animal sounds of the woods around him, we get a glimpse at both sides of Tony, the man and the monster, in one shot, the image of Tony’s eyes looking up to the sky as his hands pull the cord wrapped tightly around Fabian’s throat. This image recalls

Freud's theory of the struggle between the id, the ego, and the superego, or between man's instinctual desires and his conscience. This struggle between the id and the superego correlates to the struggle between the monster and the family man occurring within Tony's psyche in this scene. Furthermore, it is accentuated by the contrast between the conscious, as demonstrated by the visual register, and the subconscious, as demonstrated by the auditory register. It is the exposure of this dichotomy in Tony that is the overall purpose of the juxtapositions of music with the dynamics of Tony's psychoanalysis.

In addition to the sound design of ambient elements notable in the scene in the woods, the use of music has the effect of resonating with the psychoanalytical element of the show. Although her essay focuses primarily on the narrative content of the show, Martha P. Nochimson, in "Waddaya Lookin' At?: Re-reading the Gangster Genre Through 'The Sopranos,'" comments briefly on the effect of the music of the title sequence in the first episode, which appears to contrast the narrative content of the episode. The title sequence, which "is scored by a guttural rendition of 'Woke Up This Morning,' a song with the refrain 'Got yourself a gun,'" is contrasted, she claims, by such things as "Tony's seductive 'innocence'" as he plays with the ducks in his pool as well as "Tony's position of subjective child-like confusion in the psychiatrist's office," shown immediately after the song ends (8). Such is the case in many instances where music is incorporated; however, at the end of the first episode the song played does not contrast, but rather is correlative to the narrative content of the episode. The first episode introduces the character of Tony Soprano, a somewhat sensitive family man who has been thrust into a life of crime through life circumstances. The song playing as the credits role immediately at the end of the episode is a cover of Johnny Cash's "The Beast in Me" ("The Sopranos" 59:00). The song's lyrics, which describe "the beast in [the singer]" that "is caged by frail and fragile bars," harken to resonances of psychoanalysis as it relates to Tony Soprano. Tony, like the song's singer, must conceal part of himself from the world; "caged by frail and fragile bars" is the depressed, emotional, and sensitive Tony who "has had to learn to live with pain" without confronting it. Thus the lyrics, specifically as they relate to Tony, reflect the process of psychoanalysis, which deals with the layers of the conscious and unconscious that constitute the self.

Just as the show reflects the inner workings of Tony's subconscious, it also calls out changes in it as well. In the twelfth episode of season one, entitled "Isabella," Tony grapples with the symptoms of depression in the wake of the disappearance of his friend, Pussy Bonpensiero. Tony is reduced to lying in bed all day, "wallowing" in his depression and self-pity (25:20). This potent bout with depression brings Dr. Melfi to add Lithium to his cocktail of anti-depressants, "to give a jolt to [his] system," (16:20). However, the medicine, Tony reports, makes him feel, "dead, empty" (16:39). Tony's feelings of depression, self-pity, and emptiness are expressed by the song "Tiny Tears" by Tindersticks, which plays as Tony takes his medication and slumps into bed, with such lyrics as "You've been lying in bed for a week now" and "you know you're gonna cry, cry." As he deals with the challenges of his depression, conspirators form a plan to kill Tony, a plot that comes to its climax when he is attacked on the street by two thugs. Just before the attack begins, "Tiny Tears" plays again as Tony walks down the street. As the chorus comes to a crescendo, the music is halted abruptly with the sound of shattering glass as Tony dives into his car and begins to fight off his attackers. The abrupt end to the sad ballad of Tony's depression signifies a change in Tony's psyche as the life-or-death situation at hand sparks the needed jolt to his system, putting an end to his wallowing.

In the same way that the show reflects the process of psychoanalysis to the visual and auditory aspects, *The Sopranos* also applies psychological manipulation to its treatment of its audience. *The Sopranos* plays with the psychology of its audience by stripping the show of what is called ritual violence wherein music is played together with violent images in order to subdue the quality of realism. This occurs in one of the first scenes of episode one of the series where Tony beats a man whom he ran down with a car in a public park. The scene begins with the music adding a comical element to what is shown as a jaunty 1950s classic ("I Wonder Why" by Dion and the Belmonts) plays while Tony excitedly chases down his victim ("Sopranos" 9:40). The sense of enjoyment in watching the scene cultivated by the added comical element is halted abruptly at the end of the song when the car finally hits the man. When Tony gets out of the car and begins attacking the helpless wounded man, reality replaces theatricality, as in the void of the lack of music only the sounds of the violent

blows are heard. The blunt transition from music to silence is shocking, as the violence is made more realistic by the lack of music. We, like the bystanders on screen with their wide eyes, gaping mouths, and sickened expressions, are disturbed. In causing us, the audience behind the screen, to experience the same visceral reaction as the 'real' audience of the violence, the show places the spectator in the moment. With music removed, we are not watching theatrical violence or ritual violence, but real violence, and are therefore forced to acknowledge the voyeuristic tendencies of the modern audience. The show thus plays with the psychology of spectating through the use of music.

Silence or the lack of sound is similarly effective in scenes taking place in Dr. Melfi's office where the psychoanalytical process plays out. In other scenes of the show, music is used in order to demonstrate what is happening within Tony's subconscious. As Dr. Melfi and Tony discuss such problems as his relationship with his mother, his feelings towards death, and his depression, all that can be heard is the sound of their voices and their discussion. In these instances, we do not need music to remind us of the other side of Tony, as is the case when he murders Fabian Petruccio, for example. In Dr. Melfi's office music is not needed for this purpose of conveying Tony's subconscious as Tony's subconscious is the main focus of the narrative content. The sole instance wherein music is played in Dr. Melfi's office comes just before the very end of season one in the final episode when Tony comes to see Dr. Melfi after confronting his mother about her hand in the attempt on his life ("Dream" 54:22). He comes to find her office conspicuously empty, except for a custodian listening to loud music out in the hallway. This juxtaposition in Dr. Melfi's presence being always accompanied by silence and her absence being accompanied by music is reflective of the effect of music in the show. In the scenes in her office, music is not needed as Dr. Melfi herself acts as the conduit through which Tony's subconscious is reached and the psychoanalytical process is acted out.

The subconscious thoughts and feelings drawn out in the silence of Dr. Melfi's office are later reiterated by the music of the show when at the end of each episode a song plays expressing similar ideas to those uncovered in scenes where the process of psychoanalysis occurs in the narrative content. This occurs at many significant junctures in the show wherein the

two sides of Tony seem to come into conflict. In the third episode of season one, “Denial, Anger, Acceptance,” Tony mourns the coming death of his dear friend and long-time associate Jackie Aprile, Sr. In his mourning, he ponders his own thoughts about death, which he discusses in therapy with Dr. Melfi. In a therapy session, the subject of Tony’s brute criminal nature is broached when Dr. Melfi asks, “Do you feel like a...thing lacking humanity?” (“Denial” 40:04). Minutes later, at the close of the episode, Elvis Costello’s “Complicated Shadows” plays echoing this conversation between Melfi and Tony as the speaker addresses, “all [those] gangsters and rude clowns” whose “time has come,” and who must face judgment “for what [they]’ve done.” Costello’s question harkens back to Melfi’s question to Tony about his humanity.

The scene in which she asks this question ends before Tony can answer, suggesting that this is perhaps a question that is not yet answerable. The integration of the song, with its punitive lyrics, however, suggests that whatever the substance of Tony’s subconscious emotional side, it does not matter, for he will be judged for the wrong actions of his conscious, criminal side. Thus, the music has the effect here of not just addressing the process of psychoanalysis, but also calling it into question. Here it seems that whether or not there is more to Tony does not matter, he is still a criminal. The ability of the music to recall these discussions of Tony’s subconscious in the therapy sessions offers a reflexive quality to these scenes. Through this mirroring effect, we may scrutinize the therapeutic process in greater detail. The music being played during the credits renders a moment of reflection unencumbered by distracting action in the visual register as well.

The music of *The Sopranos* serves to reiterate the process of psychoanalysis in the show by adding a dimension that reflects the conscious and unconscious elements of the self. While on the conscious, surface level Tony may be murdering Fabian Petruccio, the music demonstrates how his mind is wandering, turning to thoughts of his family and his daughter. As Nochimson acknowledges in her essay, “Waddaya Lookin’ At?,” the music has this same ability to counteract the narrative content while also being able to emphasize it in greater depth as shown by the integration of Cash’s “The Beast in Me” or Costello’s “Complicated Shadows.” This manipulation of psychology also touches the audience as the juxtaposition of music



and silence affects our experience as spectators of the show. In watching the show, we sympathize with Tony; according to the psychoanalytical process played out in the show, Tony, a sensitive man, does not inherently fit the role of the cold and unfeeling mafia-man. The use of the music, however, calls our sympathy into question, asking: does Tony's soft side exonerate him of his crimes? Is he any less of a monster? What does it say about us, the voyeurs of these crimes, that we are entertained by watching them and love the man who commits them?

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MORGAN BARRY is a rising sophomore studying history in BU's College of Arts and Sciences. She hails from the small southern New Hampshire town of Windham. Morgan enjoys running, photography, and spending time with her friends, family, and much adored beagle. This piece is dedicated to Professor Michael Degener for his support in writing this paper and for giving the most in-depth editing commentary ever received by this writer. This piece is also dedicated to Joey Federico and Haley and Madison Enos for their willingness to read and re-read every essay by this writer in the wee hours of the morning and in the dead of night (and also for being the best friends a girl could have).

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## From the Instructor

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Ryan Lader wrote “The Artist Is Present and the Emotions Are Real: Time, Vulnerability, and Gender in Marina Abramovic’s Performance Art” for his capstone essay in a WR 100 “Gendered Expressions of Performance” seminar focused on women playwrights and performance artists. Students’ examination of gender politics culminated with Serbian-born performance artist Marina Abramovic’s 2010 Museum of Modern Art retrospective “The Artist Is Present.” Abramovic’s equally subtle and strenuous performance challenged students’ notions of art, and questioned the importance of gender in a seemingly “gendered-less” performance.

Lader’s essay does an excellent job of creating a conversation with various (and at times fairly disparate) sources: a gender theorist, a performance artist, and a theatre director. By engaging these sources, Lader finds a way into Abramovic’s cerebral art; he ultimately better understands why her art so fiercely impacts the audience through the critical, and creative, connections he makes. Lader worked especially hard on incorporating Judith Butler’s seminal essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” which was the seminar’s most challenging text. Lader’s rigorous intellectual work to find intersections between Abramovic and Butler paid off: his argument pushes through surface-based and reactionary observations of Abramovic’s controversial performance and examines its subterranean intelligence.

— Carrie Bennett

WR 100: Gendered Expressions of Performance

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## From the Writer

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My final paper, “The Artist Is Present and the Emotions Are Real: Time, Vulnerability, and Gender in Marina Abramovic’s Performance Art,” examines several aspects of performance art—vulnerability, time, and gender—to determine their overall contribution to the audience’s emotional response. Marina Abramovic’s performance, “The Artist Is Present,” is used as a lens for my argument. At the MOMA in New York City, Abramovic invites strangers to stare at her in silence for as long as they please. Things become quite interesting when various participants break down into tears for no apparent reason. Overall, I think much of this paper’s success stems from how interesting the topic is. Who would expect emotion from a seeming *lack* of interaction?

— Ryan Lader

RYAN LADER

## THE ARTIST IS PRESENT AND THE EMOTIONS ARE REAL: TIME, VULNERABILITY, AND GENDER IN MARINA ABRAMOVIC'S PERFORMANCE ART

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If you were to stare into the eyes of a complete stranger for a long time, would you expect to be emotionally broken? Performance artist Marina Abramovic creates this scenario in her piece “The Artist Is Present,” which takes place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. One at a time, she invites strangers to sit across from her and stare into her eyes for as long as they please. Often times, people start to cry and become overwhelmed. How could performing such a simple act elicit such a strong emotional response? Anne Bogart, Artistic Director of SITI Company, provides a useful voice to answer this question. She offers two pieces that examine the aspects of theatrical performance: “Time” and “Magnetism.” “Time” examines how altering the time frame of a performance can produce different results. Taking this into consideration, Abramovic stares at strangers for seven hours a day for three months, and the audience often participates for long periods at a time. The minuscule action involved in her performance contrasts with its lengthy time span, and I hypothesize that this long time span contributes to the audiences’ emotional response. Additionally, “Magnetism” examines the effects of the performer and audiences’ shared empathy for one another. This “human heartbeat”—in other words, shared humanity—creates vulnerability, allowing for a more “personal and intimate” experience of the performance (Bogart 65). Moreover, the vulnerability created by Abramovic in her audience allows her to reveal suppressed sadness within the participant. Although Bogart’s pieces involve theatre rather than performance art, they share a “performing” aspect; thus, their sources are useful for examining Abramovic’s performance. Lastly, American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler

offers an essay written in 1988 called “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” explaining that gender is an ever-changing social construction of the way we act (Butler 531). According to Butler, a woman (in this case Abramovic) is seen by society as having maternal characteristics: to what extent does this affect the way people react to her presence? The goal of this essay is to examine these aspects—vulnerability, time, and gender—and consider which elements of Abramovic’s performance contribute most directly to the audience’s emotional response.

## Abramovic’s Use of Time Contrast

According to Bogart, time is a tool used to control how an audience perceives a performance, which exposes Abramovic’s use of time to affect her subjects. Bogart uses an anecdote in which a Swiss geologist examined the mental states of several people who had experienced near-death falls in the Alps. She notes that “mental activity became enormous, rising to hundred-fold velocity. Time became greatly expanded” (128). In the context of a near-death experience, peoples’ thoughts race because of a natural human reaction to the situation. Normally, people fail to think at this pace; however, the context of the situation causes time to be *perceived* as expanded because an abundance of thought takes place relative to a short time span. Taking this into consideration, the opposite is true: the performer can use time to change the context of a situation. This scenario can be true in non-near-death experiences, but on an intentional artistic level. Abramovic does so in “The Artist Is Present” when she slows down time by incorporating very little interaction into a long time span. Director Robert Wilson can relate: “In my pieces everything is slowed down. If it’s going to take me five minutes to pick up a spoon, first of all it’s going to be painful just to control it. But what happens to with my awareness of my body as I do it?” (qtd. in Bogart 133). According to Wilson, your body naturally analyzes actions in “real” time; when you slow down your regular actions to a much longer time scale, you have more time to analyze everything that occurs in that moment, including your own thought process. Picking up a spoon normally takes a short moment, but stretching this action out to five minutes exponentially increases your awareness of the action. Further, when the audience member participates in Abramovic’s long performance, she has time to metacognitively reflect on her actions

and environment, enabling an altered perception of the act. Abramovic controls her audience in this manner by contrasting time length with size of interaction. Later on, we will directly examine to what extent this time scale elicits an emotional response in the participant.

Returning to the aspect of time, Abramovic's lengthy performance allows the audience member enough time to "sink in" to the performance and become vulnerable to Abramovic's silent examination. Let us first examine the length of the performance. The audience members ultimately decide how long to stay, because they can walk away whenever they please; however, more people decide to sit for a long time. One audience member commented, "she slows everybody's brain down, she asks us to stay there for quite a length of time . . . she transforms us as a result" (*The Artist Is Present*). Abramovic never asks anyone to stay for any length of time, but we can see that this audience member believes so; because of this, we see an established connection between Abramovic and her audience. During this length of time, she "slows down" the brain by creating a contrast between time and interaction. Remember Robert Wilson's comment about spending five minutes to pick up a spoon? Bogart would argue that this contrast between time span and interaction allows for one's thoughts to race at said "ten-fold velocity." An eleven year-old boy described his experience with mysterious nostalgia: "It's like some other world . . . and time flies quicker" (*The Artist Is Present*). Judging by this, the "other world" must be a state of consciousness created by the performance's length of time. After a while, the audience enters this state of mind where thoughts at ten-fold velocity occur. Due to Abramovic's silent examinations and eye contact, the audience becomes vulnerable.

## Empathy and Vulnerability

Additionally, the empathy shared between the performer and audience reveals how Abramovic's audience is left vulnerable by her stare. In "Magnetism," Bogart explains that a performance becomes attractive when it exhibits characteristics with which the audience can identify. Commenting on how the audience identifies with a performance, Bogart writes, "the human heartbeat serves as the red thread through any theatrical labyrinth and will lead to the vulnerability at center of the event" (65). In other words, even the most complicated performance—the "theatrical

labyrinth”—exhibits the characteristic of human nature (i.e. the human heartbeat) to which the audience can relate. According to Bogart, because of the shared humanity between performer and audience, vulnerability surrounds the performance; the audience member begins to carry out self-reflection when she sees this commonality in the performance. In the case of “The Artist Is Present,” because the audience member can only think in the given situation, she may be wondering about Abramovic’s thoughts too, which leaves her subject to Abramovic’s silent examination. We will later examine the extent to which this “silent examination,” combined with the observer’s vulnerability, emotionally affects the audience.

Abramovic’s use of time sets the stage for vulnerability, resulting in pain within the audience members. The contrast between time span and interaction creates the “mental zone” in which thoughts at ten-fold velocities occur. In addition, Bogart would argue that the humanity shared between Abramovic and the audience creates an unspoken empathy “which leads to vulnerability at the center of the event” (65). The act is so simple that the audience has the time to analyze its simplicity: we are both here, and we are both human; we share that with each other. The performance creates vulnerability because hiding behind anything is impossible, especially physically. In fact, set design removed the table that was originally present between Abramovic and her audience to increase this vulnerability factor. The curator of “The Artist Is Present,” Klaus Biesenbach, commented that the lack of the table makes Abramovic much more vulnerable and “makes her very unprotected . . . but it heightens the seriousness . . . and the severe nature of the piece” (“*The Artist Is Present*”). The woeful reactions of sobbing audience members elucidate this seriousness and severe nature. These reactions almost always consist of the audience beginning to shed tears, while maintaining the stare with Abramovic the entire time (“*The Artist Is Present*”). Further, prolonged eye contact causes vulnerability; one audience member commented that eye contact is strange because “most of us are afraid of it and Marina is offering it infinitely” (“*The Artist Is Present*”). Humans avoid eye contact, but this performance is based around it, thus causing the audience to become vulnerable. The audience as well as Abramovic accept this vulnerability. The unavoidable silent examination then creates the window for an emotional response to occur. Abramovic offers another point of view: “they’re sitting there; I’m just a



mirror of their own self” (*The Artist Is Present*). The audience members subconsciously analyze their own thoughts and feelings (the metacognitive process that Bogart mentions, expressed earlier) all while having to maintain the stare of vulnerability. As a result, people often become overwhelmed by their own painful feelings. Abramovic sympathizes, “Some of them are really open to feel incredible pain. Some of them have so much pain” (*The Artist Is Present*). She consequently tries to stay open to feel incredible pain because openness comes from the willingness of the participant, thus creating vulnerability within the scenario. Bogart believes that this ability consequently allows one to identify and understand another person’s emotions (65). The vulnerability of the participant proves integral in the emotional response of the participant, but could not exist without Abramovic’s creative use of contrasting time span with minimal interaction.

## Does Gender Affect an Audience’s Perception?

Aside from the performance’s direct components of time manipulation and vulnerability, the factor of gender is another debatable force that affects the performance’s effect on its audience. Gender theorist Judith Butler argues that gender is a social construction, which sheds light on how Abramovic’s womanhood affects her audiences’ perception of “The Artist Is Present.” In “Performative Acts and Gender Construction,” Butler explains that we construct gender through a “stylized repetition of acts” that conforms to how *society* views those acts with respect to the male or female category (519). She further begins to explain that the body is the stylized medium, and that “the body is not self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning . . . and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic” (521). The manner of the body’s materiality being fundamentally “dramatic” expresses that what we put on socially, mentally, and physically constructs a gender. In other words, the way we present ourselves externally points to our constructed genders. Simply put, we construct gender through expression and do not create this characteristic at birth. As Simone de Beauvoir claims, “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman” (qtd. in Butler 519). People become women through the stylized repetition of “womanly” acts. We can easily categorize “womanly acts” because we construct them as a society. Using gender as a

lens through which to examine “The Artist Is Present” proves especially useful because Abramovic uses the body as a medium for her performance act, and Butler depends on the body as a central aspect of her argument. Later, we will analyze how Abramovic’s gender contributes to how the audience receives her performance.

In addition, the extent that Abramovic’s womanliness affects the audience and elicits an emotional response must be determined. When you put yourself in the position of the audience, you are sitting across from a woman, and that is the extent of the sexuality you encounter throughout the piece. Does sitting across from what society views as a maternal figure cause people to seek compassion for their inner pain? I ask this because oftentimes, society regards women as more caring and compassionate than men. In addition to arguing that gender is a social construction, gender theorist Judith Butler argues, “To be female is[...] a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign” (522). What Butler means is that to be a woman, one must externally display womanly characteristics and *act* like a woman in society would act. In “The Artist Is Present,” Abramovic is better characterized as a female than a woman because she does not act in any womanly way that abides by womanly social constructs. Staring and sitting in a chair—the only action taken by Abramovic—can be performed by both men *and* women. Although audience members can see Abramovic’s womanly stylization of the body, they cannot fully regard her as a woman due to the lack of stylized repetition of *acts* that constitute her womanhood (Butler 519). Even then, her stylization of the body involves dressing in a robe much like a monk would, which makes her seem even less “womanly” (“*The Artist Is Present*”). Because the audience cannot identify womanhood with Abramovic directly with respect to her actions, the audience is likely to not seek compassion in the performer and emotionally respond directly due to gender. Therefore, with regards to causing an emotional response in the audience, gender does not affect the audience in comparison to time and vulnerability, which work together.

Although we have deduced that both time and vulnerability contribute more exactly to emotional response than gender, we must consider how gender is perhaps a directly contributing factor. For example, what

if Abramovic were a man? To understand the significance of this question, let's turn to Judith Butler and her notion of gender. By man, I mean holding the external characteristics of what society views as a "manly" man: for example, a chiseled jaw or rugged beard. I deduce that one is less likely to break down in front of a man because society sees this as a sign of weakness. People in general are more likely to become vulnerable in the presence of a woman because of the "historical idea" that women are caring and motherly figures in society. So what if a "manly" male is the performer? Anthropologist Victor Turner argues that gender is a "social action [that] requires a performance which is *repeated*" (qtd. in Butler 526). While this is agreeable with Butler's argument, there is no gendered "act" that takes place in "The Artist Is Present" because the act is not associated with a repeated social norm with respect to a certain gender. In fact, Abramovic's ex-lover, Ulay, (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) sits across from Abramovic, and they both begin to sob and reach for each other's hands after some time ("*The Artist Is Present*"). We have both genders present in this situation that emotionally react to the performance; therefore, there is little possibility of gender having a substantial effect on the vulnerability and thus emotional response of the audience because the act itself is not gendered. However, if the act were to be changed, perhaps if Abramovic were nude for the performance, one would be more aware of her womanly "stylization of the body" that Butler argues constitutes genderization. Even then, the maximum effects of gender are only yielded when the act itself has characteristics of a historically constructed gender; therefore, in the case of "The Artist Is Present," gender's effects are incomparable to vulnerability and time contrast. With regards to this, one cannot argue that vulnerability causes these responses, as throughout "The Artist Is Present," people break down during longer performances, and the *time contrast* is what causes the metacognitive thought process leading to *vulnerability*, allowing for a self-reflective thought process in the presence of Abramovic.

We have concluded that out of three aspects of Abramovic's performance—time contrast, vulnerability, and gender—time contrast and vulnerability contribute most directly to the emotional responses that occur during "The Artist Is Present." The fact that such a simple act of observing one another in silence can elucidate deep emotional reaction is shocking, but is logically explained when one examines the contrast of

how long the actual performance can be and how little physically occurs; self-reflection occurs rapidly, empathy shared between performer and audience causes vulnerability, and Abramovic acts as a “mirror” of the subject’s pain to him or her self. One may consider that the audience may be more inclined to seek compassion in Abramovic due to her gender; however, Butler’s argument about how we construct gender counters the fact, because Abramovic’s act is gender-neutral. What if we consider Abramovic’s previous performances and her use of stylization of the body? Abramovic would often appear nude in her performances, using her body as a medium for self-inflicted pain; however, “The Artist Is Present” is different because although she uses her body as a medium for the act, the act is relatively “genderless,” whereas in previous performances, the nudity would have clear implications that surrounded gender as the body is exposed in its purest form. What could Abramovic be saying about gender by straying from her usual gendered appearance in her performance art? Perhaps she is denying the importance of gender in performance art and in life by constructing a gender-neutral act. Regardless of her intentions, we cannot completely discard gender as a contributing factor of human interaction. For example, men often hold the door for women as a sign of gender courtesy. How could one ignore Abramovic’s beautiful womanly face, her long black hair? Perhaps our perceptions are a bit altered despite our ignorance. Nevertheless, Abramovic’s strong use of time and vulnerability as tools in performance art overshadow gender, evoking a powerful response in her audience during “The Artist Is Present.”

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## From the Instructor

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In my WR 100 class “Ethical Missteps in Public Health,” students explore key events in public health history—and, more specifically, the Progressive Era—that spurred the development of codes of ethics that continue to inform public health research and policy to this day. Prior to such codes, the conduct of doctors acting as researchers was guided primarily by subjective judgment, a model borrowed from the doctor-patient relationship and characterized by so-called “medical beneficence.” Not surprisingly, doctor reliance on subjective judgment was tainted with personal prejudice and misconceptions, including the belief that race, ethnicity and social status were confirmations of biological difference. Two public health milestones, the now notorious Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis and the 1927 Supreme Court Case *Buck v. Bell*, starkly illustrate the kinds of abuses that arise in the absence of stringent protections for human subjects. It may be tempting for practitioners and students of public health to harshly judge the conduct of physicians whose research and social policies left a legacy of such profound human suffering. In her compelling and thorough exploration of these missteps, however, Jamie Tam argues for a more nuanced approach, cautioning that a perhaps more forgiving understanding of these events, informed by the context of their time, better serves the prevention of such missteps in the future.

— Melanie Smith

WR 100: Ethical Missteps in Public Health

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## From the Writer

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My paper reflects upon the questionable decisions of American physicians during the Progressive Era. Since not everyone may understand medical beneficence, I began my essay by explaining how education fostered the “doctor knows best” mentality before delving into the more complex topics of racism, political implications, and public health. While reexamining Supreme Court cases of racism and eugenics, I surprised myself by sympathizing with both the perceived “good” and “bad” groups—the millions of patients who were wronged by doctors and researchers, and the criticized doctors who were trained in such racially-charged social and professional environments. Rather than choosing sides like I thought I would, I found myself better understanding the degree to which context can affect action. This emotional connection to the subject matter was both a challenge and inspiration for me, as it contrasted my expectations and prompted me to write about the lesser-known details behind the nation’s public health controversies. My ultimate goal was to make a statement that resonates with my readers and leaves them with a more rounded view of the complexity of America’s medical history.

— Jamie Tam

## BEYOND BENEFICENCE: A REEVALUATION OF MEDICAL PRACTICES DURING THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

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In the 1914 case of *Schloendorff v. Society of New York Hospital*, Justice Cardozo of the New York Court of Appeals declared that “Every human being of adult years and sound mind has a right to determine what shall be done with his own body; and a surgeon who performs an operation without his patient’s consent commits an assault for which he is liable in damages.”<sup>1</sup> These words planted the seed for the informed consent doctrine, which is the right for a patient to evaluate medical options knowledgeably and to exercise autonomy in the decision-making process.<sup>2</sup> The goal of this doctrine is to “protect patients from the imbalance of knowledge within the physician-patient relationship” by allowing the patient to determine which operations doctors can and cannot perform on his body.<sup>3</sup> Though nowadays doctors are expected to notify patients of the details and risks that a procedure entails, medical history demonstrates that this was not always the case. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American medicine operated under a model of beneficence. According to Jonathan Will, doctor of bioethics and law, this model prioritized doctors’ discretion over patients’ preferences and encouraged physicians to deceive patients and withhold information doctors perceived as “detrimental to the patient’s prognosis.”<sup>4</sup> Despite doctors’ widespread use of beneficence, Americans were aware, as early as 1914 from the *Schloendorff* case, of every patient’s right to permit or refuse certain bodily operations. Why then did doctors commit such heinous acts of deception and mistreatment in instances like the 1927 case of *Buck v. Bell* and the forty-year-long Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis? We cannot attribute the atrocities of America’s medical history solely to Will’s notion of medical beneficence. However, we can more thoroughly



comprehend the behavior of the Tuskegee doctors and the Progressive Era eugenicists, by viewing their actions as the product of beneficence, medical education, and social attitudes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of which shaped their skewed perceptions of morality. Because these three factors taught members of the medical field that concern for the common good trumped the value of individual rights, physicians' actions often clashed with modern standards of acceptable conduct.

Though we view doctors' actions during the Progressive Era as questionable today, the public had faith in their abilities and discretion at the time because of the medical schooling they had completed. The educational background of many southern physicians fostered a mutual understanding of a "doctor knows best" mentality. Perhaps the most notorious illustration of this outlook is the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis, a 40-year-long experiment that began in 1932 and sought to observe the natural course of syphilis in a group of black males in Alabama (Brandt 18).<sup>5</sup> Consistent with the beneficence model, the Tuskegee doctors wove benevolent deception throughout their interactions with the subjects, believing it was in the patients' best interests to know as little detail as possible about the kind of "special treatment" they were receiving.<sup>6</sup> As one survivor of the study, Mr. Pollard, stated, he and the other subjects assumed the doctors were simply trying to cure their "bad blood."<sup>7</sup> However, the doctors never specified exactly what "bad blood" meant. Such ambiguity was necessary to execute the true objective of the experiment, which was to confirm the doctors' belief that disease susceptibility varied from race to race.<sup>8</sup> This notion stemmed from medical education of the 1900s, as the architects of the Tuskegee Study graduated from the University of Virginia Medical School. This school was renowned for its curriculum of "racial medicine," which taught students that racial groups differed in their likelihood of contracting certain diseases.<sup>9</sup> Because this belief in race-based medicine was taught in university courses, it was largely perceived as fact, rather than prejudice. Not only did most of the doctors of the study graduate from this medical school, but they were also members of the United States Public Health Service, a federal organization whose purpose was to eliminate disease from the American population.<sup>10</sup> The doctors' national-level positions were so effective in influencing the public to regard them as knowledgeable figures of authority that even professional communities of

colored people did not perceive them as enemies.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, patients did whatever doctors instructed them to do without question. Therefore, in the context of the 1930s, previous medical training seemed to justify doctors' use of patient deception and ambiguity.

Besides the southern doctors' training in race-based medicine, the prevalent racist sentiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century added kindling to the fire of patient and subject mistreatment. For instance, many southern doctors of the 1900s asserted that all blacks were promiscuous, unintelligent, poor, and both morally and physically dirty, all of which contributed to their propensity to disease, crime, and degeneracy.<sup>12</sup> This harsh stereotype gave rise to the belief that the black race would not survive in America's Darwinian society and was doomed to extinction, unsalvageable by education or philanthropy.<sup>13</sup> These racist attitudes toward blacks shaped the Tuskegee doctors' treatment of the patients "simply as subjects in a 'study,' not as human beings."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the physicians did not believe the black population deserved equal treatment, as that was reserved only for those they considered to be human to the fullest extent of the word. Hence, from the doctors' perspectives, the social context of racism legitimized their controversial behavior at the time.

Similarly, pairing prejudice with medical beneficence would more thoroughly explain eugenicists' mistreatment of individuals than beneficence alone could. Extending from the racism of the Tuskegee doctors, Progressive Era eugenicists also opposed the proliferation of the black race and any other group of people deemed "unfit" for reproduction. They feared the spread of any types of traits that could potentially taint the genetic makeup of the American people. One eugenicist physician remarked, "Time and time again the feebleminded individual has been pointed out as a menace to the mental stability of the future generations of this country. These unfortunates manifest a propensity for begetting numerous offspring, without responsibility for the present or regard for the future."<sup>15</sup> Because eugenicists insisted on perfecting the genetic makeup of mankind, they strongly advocated the sterilization of prostitutes, alcoholics, criminals, the impoverished, the deaf, the blind, those with mental disabilities or physical deformities, and others who possessed undesirable characteristics.<sup>16</sup> Given that eugenicists lacked sound proof that such traits were hereditary and harmful to the future of America, it would not be

unreasonable to say that racism and prejudice, not scientific evidence, was the driving force for sterilization initiatives. Thus, the subjective attitudes of the early 1900s are another factor critical to understanding the actions of Progressive Era eugenicists.

As for the political implications of those social attitudes, human experimentation and sterilization would not have gained so much federal support had national public health organizations not been dominated by advocates of race-based medicine and eugenic theory. In the notorious 1927 Supreme Court case of *Buck v. Bell*, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes upheld the Virginia sterilization bill, indicating the powerful influence that eugenics rationale had upon sectors of the federal government.<sup>17</sup> But, the upholding itself was not enough for Justice Holmes, who uttered the infamous phrase, “Three generations of imbeciles are enough” when referring to client Carrie Buck’s alleged lineage of mental disability.<sup>18</sup> His use of such charged language indicates that eugenics theory significantly impacted his decision to legalize coercive state intervention in sterilization cases. This institutionalization of eugenics succeeded because graduates from the University of Virginia Medical School dominated executive roles in United States Public Health Service (USPHS), a federal public health organization. The tight bond between these two establishments “assured a continuity of personnel trained within a similar institutional and social culture, and ensured a commonality of belief about African Americans, sexually transmitted disease, and public health.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, doctors trained at the University of Virginia later assumed federal positions in the USPHS, allowing for the perpetuation of racial medicine, prejudiced sentiments, and eugenics principles in experiments like the Tuskegee Study and *Buck v. Bell*. The resulting “dynasty” of Tuskegee medical professionals parallels the alleged “reign of doctors” involved in eugenics and sterilization.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the lessons in racial medicine taught at the University of Virginia in conjunction with the widespread racism of the Progressive Era led to an institutionalization of eugenics beliefs that permeated federal infrastructure.

Considering the fact that public health advocates and eugenicists shared the common goal of maximizing benefits for the whole of society, eugenics was not entirely “bad.” The idea that public welfare overrides individual concerns serves as the foundational underpinning for both

public health initiatives and eugenics. At the time of the Progressive Era, it was not unheard of for physicians to advocate “appropriate and kindly segregation” to “weed out” morally, physically, and mentally impaired individuals from civilization; such individuals posed a threat to society because they could pass on their defects to successive generations.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Woods Hutchinson, who spoke in 1912 before the American Public Health Association, even proposed performing careful examinations on children as young as three years old and isolating the flawed ones in a “special environment.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the notion of sterilization exemplifies this prioritization of “the good of society” because it seeks to eliminate defective members of society in order to improve the human germ plasm. With such an optimistically phrased objective, sterilization became a popular practice of the early 1900s. In fact, eugenics and public health shared common methods in disease prevention, which included the following: segregation of mentally impaired individuals in institutions, which paralleled quarantine of diseased persons; sterilization as an elimination of disease-causing agents and as a mode of inducing infertility; immigration restrictions to prevent the influx of contaminated or genetically defective foreigners.<sup>23</sup> Through this sharing of techniques, public health workers and eugenicists established a common “cultural ethic” that promoted the rights of the masses over those of the individual.<sup>24</sup> For all of these reasons, eugenics became virtually synonymous with public health as “eugenics meant not just having good genes but also being a good parent, raising good children, and promoting good health for future generations.”<sup>25</sup> Though we are accustomed to classifying eugenics as strictly “bad” and public health as generally “good,” a comparison of their purposes and approaches reveals commonly-overlooked similarities that demonstrate why doctors’ disreputable behaviors were considered acceptable in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, critics of *Buck v. Bell* and of sterilization in general, would disagree with the assertion that eugenics was not rooted in evil. Take, for instance, *Buck v. Bell* Attorney Irving Whitehead, who proclaimed sterilization to be a recipe for tyranny.<sup>26</sup> He believed this because state standards of sterilization had never been firmly established during the Progressive Era, so there was a lingering fear that eugenicists and doctors could wield a subjective, unchecked power to sterilize individuals.<sup>27</sup> While Whitehead’s fear seems completely rational from a modern stance, those who support

him without question most likely have not considered his viewpoint in the context of the 1900s, a time during which doctors were entrusted with great power in accordance with the beneficence model. As omniscient professionals, it only seemed fitting that physicians be endowed with virtually absolute authority. Other critics of eugenics include people like American historian and evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, who labeled sterilization as “a procedure of such dubious morality.”<sup>28</sup> Gould gave this label upon finding that Carrie Buck’s daughter, Vivian, earned average grades in school, evidence that would suggest that she was not the mentally deficient girl that eugenicists made her out to be. Still, none could be sure if Vivian’s mental intelligence was “normal” due to a) her unresponsive nature in infancy, and b) her mother and grandmother’s history of extremely poor IQ scores.<sup>29</sup> But, as previously stated, eugenicists and doctors acted on their suspicions because they were trained in racial medicine and then expected to apply those learnings in a manner that benefitted the bulk of society, even if that meant forfeiting the welfare of the individual. Consequently, the claims of critics like Whitehead and Gould cannot be fully trusted because they may not acknowledge all the circumstances of the debate at hand.

Considering the degree to which racism and education influenced physicians and eugenicists of the Progressive Era, the beneficence model does not adequately account for the cases of patient injustice at the time. During the early 1900s, doctors faced with the challenge of serving either in the best interests of patients or of collective society often sided with the latter. The doctors’ educational background in racial medicine as well as prejudiced sentiments made it all the more difficult to discern scientifically-based actions from expressions of mere opinion. Nonetheless, racial medicine and eugenics resounded enough to pervade federal law and was further legitimated by its similarities to tenets of public health. As a result, the perspectives of doctors and eugenicists active in cases like the Tuskegee Study and *Buck v. Bell* tended to be myopic. But, if such rampant racism, eugenics theory, and beneficent mentality are not ubiquitous today, how is this relevant to the field of modern medicine? The answer lies in the lessons it offers about crossing into the gray areas of medical morality, such as genetic engineering and embryonic manipulation. Maintaining ethics in medicine and public health is like holding a stack of china; the tower of

dishes teeters and with one misstep can easily shatter into a million pieces. What we are left with is a mess difficult to clean and an incident too impressive to forget, as are the faults of America's past. And, though we cannot repair said faults, we can at least attempt to better understand the motivations of the fault-makers by evaluating their social contexts. Then, we can refine current methods accordingly to help prevent similar controversial blunders from recurring. In our hands we hold the precious plates of America's future in public health, and we must handle them with care.

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JAMIE TAM is a behavior and health major from Parsippany, NJ. A member of BU's Sargent College and the class of 2017, she is studying to become an occupational therapist. She dedicates this paper to her WR 100 professor, Melanie Smith, for her tremendous encouragement and guidance during the writing process. She would also like to thank Sarah Norman, Joe Gillespie, Nicole Colello-Kim, Christine Mortenson, Julianne Sanchez, and Jennifer Frantz for the insight and instruction that has helped shape her writing throughout the years.

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## From the Instructor

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Laura Coughlin submitted her remarkable essay, “Fitting Animal Liberation into Conceptions of American Freedom: A Critique of Peter Singer’s Argument for Preference Utilitarianism” as the final essay in WR 150: “The Rhetoric of Freedom in America,” a course that helps students to research and to write critically about rhetoric in a series of classic texts exploring the concept of freedom. By explicating primary texts by thinkers as diverse as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Martin Luther King, Laura and her classmates were challenged to enhance their reading comprehension skills, hone their critical thinking, writing, and scholarship, and enter into the debate over the meaning of freedom throughout American history.

In the metacognitive introduction to her final portfolio, “Foundations of Freedom: How Foundational Texts Have Impacted the Rhetoric of Freedom Throughout American History,” Laura wrote, “The depth of my arguments has grown throughout the semester as the topics became more open and complex and my sources became more varied. This is particularly true of my final essay, a critique of the modern American animal rights movement’s choice of using Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* as a foundational text. I prove in the essay that his work is rhetorically incompatible with American conceptions of freedom, but concede that animal rights groups’ choice to use his work is still reasonable if they value it for sentimental strength rather than argumentative strength.” Laura, an accomplished member of the Boston University Debate team, brought a precocious understanding of counterevidence and counterargument to the final term of the year-long writing sequence required of Boston University students. In the early part of the term, she struggled a bit with her style; at first, her impressive skills with deductive reasoning sometimes crowded out her voice as an essayist. By the final essay, however, she demonstrated that she could both stage a complex argument and package that argument within the confident and authoritative tone of an expert.

— Thomas Underwood

WR 150: The Rhetoric of Freedom in America

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## From the Writer

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Since I've been a vegetarian from the age of ten, the animal rights movement has been near and dear to my heart. But, in looking through the trends of the rhetoric of freedom in America, it was difficult to find our philosophical place among other rights activists. The theme of equality and equal application of natural rights has been essential to nearly every other rights movement in the United States, all the way from abolitionism to the LGBTQ movement. The tactic of arguing for equality and invoking the words of the Founding Fathers has a hugely successful track record. So, why aren't animal rights activists following the same template?

To better understand the rhetoric of the movement, I first looked to Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, the so-called Bible for animal rights activists. I had always revered Singer, but a closer look at his argumentation showed that his advocacy is incompatible with rights theories in general. That doesn't make his arguments weak, but it does make it a strange choice for animal rights activists to praise him as their forefather, given that he doesn't actually support the concept of "rights" for either humans or animals. This cognitive dissonance inspired me to dig deeper.

This essay was a good exercise in remaining impartial. As a strong supporter of the movement, I wanted to make sure I didn't stray too far from an objective analysis of the argumentation. As a supporter of Singer's framework of preference utilitarianism, I didn't want to make excuses or allowances for his arguments and their potential to create large-scale social change.

— Laura Coughlin

LAURA COUGHLIN

## FITTING ANIMAL LIBERATION INTO CONCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM: A CRITIQUE OF PETER SINGER'S ARGUMENT FOR PREFERENCE UTILITARIANISM

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The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) filed a lawsuit in 2011 against Seaworld, Inc. for violating the constitutional rights of orca whales, a move that was met with public incredulity and hilarity. Five orcas, which were caught in the wild and forced into captivity to perform tricks or be denied food or placed in solitary confinement, were listed as the plaintiffs.<sup>1</sup> The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, PETA's general counsel argued, prohibits "slavery [or] involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted," and this language does not specify a certain class of victims.<sup>2</sup> PETA considered keeping sentient and rational beings captive and forcing them to perform to be a form of slavery, and argued that, because the Thirteenth Amendment does not explicitly say that it applies only to humans, forcing orcas into servitude violates the Constitution. Ingrid Newkirk, president and founder of PETA, explained in a press statement that "[orcas at Seaworld] are denied freedom and everything else that is natural and important to them while kept in small concrete tanks and reduced to performing stupid tricks" and that "the orcas are, by definition, slaves."<sup>3</sup> The case was dismissed on the grounds that because "'slavery' and 'involuntary servitude' are uniquely human activities, as those terms have been historically and contemporaneously applied, there is simply no basis to construe the Thirteenth Amendment as applying to non-humans."<sup>4</sup> Although this lawsuit was clearly a publicity stunt and not a serious legal claim, it exemplifies the problem that animal rights activists have faced throughout American history—the American legal system

distributes protection following the theory of natural rights that was established early in American history, and it is applied only to humans.

Early American conceptions of freedom have been the foundation of nearly every subsequent rights movement in the United States. In the eyes of the nation's founders, men were born with moral rights that are unquestionable and inalienable. This view was immortalized in the Declaration of Independence, with the pivotal assertions that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," and that "to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."<sup>5</sup> The Declaration claims that not only do natural rights exist, but also that protecting those rights is the purpose of government. This idea originated in Enlightenment philosophy, which heavily influenced the nation's founders. It would later be enshrined in the Bill of Rights, and subsequently in the American people's idea of what it means to be free.

Most rights movements have co-opted the rhetoric of early American philosophy while animal rights groups have not. Women's suffragists and abolitionists both used the exact wording of the Declaration of Independence to advance their cause. Suffragettes used the entire document, beginning when Elizabeth Cady Stanton rewrote it as the Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention and altered the language to include women.<sup>6</sup> The phrase "all men are created equal," and how Americans ought to interpret that phrase, was an integral part of argumentation against slavery.<sup>7</sup> Abraham Lincoln adopted it, and further cemented its place in American history by including it in his Gettysburg Address.<sup>8</sup> The same words were quoted again by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his "I Have a Dream" speech.<sup>9</sup>

This philosophical foundation has changed very little throughout centuries of social progress. At the time when the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights were written, the rights described were given only to white men, and most social movements have not pushed to change the rights Americans value, but rather to change to whom we give those rights. Because these movements kept their conceptions of freedom the same, their rhetoric was centered around equality—if they could make the case that people of all races, or all genders, or all sexual orientations are equal,

then it would follow that they were all deserving of the same rights as white men. Convincing people of equality was not easy, but for all of these groups the struggle was similar, the rhetoric was interconnected, and the end goal was the same.

The same approach would not work for the animal rights activists who fought for animal freedom in the twentieth century. In order to co-opt early American rhetoric they would need to prove equality between humans and animals, a burden that cannot be met. Americans measure human equality in terms of rationality and morality, and it is impossible to prove that animals meet the same standards as humans. They are fundamentally different from humans, both in rational capacity and ability to follow moral principles or participate in a social contract. They cannot even make use of some of the natural rights that Americans deem most important, such as the right to vote or to free speech.

Earlier advocates for animals did not need to prove equality, because they only pushed for increased protection out of sympathy. These groups conceded that humans have moral rights and animals do not, and simply tried to protect them from egregious and unnecessary harm. Their rhetoric focused on compassion for animals for the sake of kindness, rather than asserting that animals have any sort of rights claim to being treated well. These activists would later become known as animal welfarists.<sup>10</sup> But, activists in the 1960s took a bolder approach, claiming that protecting animals is not just a matter of kindness, but a moral obligation to recognize and defend rights. As a result of that approach they needed to meet a much higher philosophical burden than their forebears did, and one that was different and more complex than the burdens of other rights movements. They would either need to prove equality so that they could co-opt early American rhetoric, or find a new rights theory that would allow them to develop independent rhetoric of their own.

This high burden made animal rights advocates unable to form a cohesive movement with rhetoric that could overcome the boundary of natural rights theory for most of American history. This changed dramatically with the publication of *Animal Liberation*, a book by the Australian philosopher Peter Singer. Singer applied the principles of utilitarianism to the treatment of animals, arguing that animal preferences should be weighed just as human preferences are when considering utility. The book

was hugely successful, both with critics and with animal rights groups. It became a catalyst for the Animal Liberation movement in America, and it remains the foundational rhetoric for modern activists, so much so that it is frequently referred to as the Bible of the Animal Liberation movement.<sup>11</sup> Singer answered the problem of equality and natural rights with regard to animals in an unconventional way—he argued that we should abandon the concept of a rights framework altogether, because rights are simply “a political shorthand” and are unnecessary when considering ethics.<sup>12</sup> According to his claims, rights are an arbitrary metric for ethical obligations, and making them inalienable often leads to more suffering. A theory that protects an inalienable right to life would prevent governments from ever killing people, even if it would save the lives of thousands of others. Singer’s theory is that humans have an obligation to take whatever actions have the best outcomes overall, even if it means violating the autonomy or “rights” of a smaller group. This would not just make it permissible for governments to kill one person to save many, it would make it obligatory. But even if this argument is logically valid, it is incompatible with American conceptions of freedom and would not work as a rhetorical basis for widespread change in the treatment of animals in the United States.

Singer advocated for what he called “preference utilitarianism.”<sup>13</sup> Utilitarianism is a moral framework that says one ought to act in the way that results in the most overall utility, or the most pleasure and least suffering. The goal is to have the highest possible amount of collective happiness in the world and the least amount of collective pain. He rejected the idea of rights completely. He said that although opponents of animal rights said that “to have rights a being must be autonomous, or must be a member of a community, or must have the ability to respect the rights of others, or possess a sense of justice,” those claims are “irrelevant to the case for Animal Liberation.”<sup>14</sup> By abandoning the concept of rights, he circumvented the logical problem of equality. He conceded that his opponents’ arguments in that regard were true but rejected their rhetoric, and the rhetoric of other movements for freedom, by saying that their arguments for rights were just a convenient rhetorical device. According to his philosophy, using a rights framework and arguing for equality is fundamentally flawed, because even in humans we have “no absolute guarantee that [people’s] capacities and abilities are spread evenly among the different

racess and between the sexes,” and scientific proof that people are different in either of these capacities could make arguments for equal rights fall apart.<sup>15</sup> He pushed this idea further by showing that we give people with mental disabilities the same protection as others, even though they are not equal to other humans in many ways.<sup>16</sup> Singer argued that in every issue we should seek “the solution with the best consequences for all affected,” which would be the solution that “satisfies the most preferences, weighted in accordance with the strength of the preferences.”<sup>17</sup> Since animals have preferences, we can include them when we weigh all of the pleasure and suffering in the world and try to maximize utility. This would lead to outcomes like the elimination of the meat industry, which is responsible for the suffering and death of billions of animals every year. In Singer’s metric, the preference of these animals not to be slaughtered would outweigh the comparatively weak preference of humans to have meat in their diets.

But, utilitarianism is not compatible with the idea of natural rights, and therefore cannot coexist with most prominent American movements and rhetoric. If rights exist that can never be infringed upon, it would be impossible to properly weigh preferences and take the actions that achieve maximum utility. American rhetoric asserts inalienable rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and we have encoded that philosophy in the law.<sup>18</sup> Utilitarianism would require governments to kill one citizen if it led to the best outcome for others, a concept that violates the inalienable right to life and one that Americans cringe away from. But, if Americans keep the concept of natural rights for humans and attempt to apply preference utilitarianism to animals, human interests will always take priority and animals will be no better off. If one group has rights and the other simply has preferences, it is impossible to weigh their interests fairly. For Singer’s framework to work, then, humans would need to abandon their natural rights.

It might be possible, or even preferable, for a hypothetical society to use an approach to freedom that does not include a framework of natural rights, but it is not possible in the United States. It would require Americans to give up on the ideas that their nation was founded upon, ideas that have been ingrained into their collective psyche through nationalism and reverence of the Founding Fathers. Giving up natural rights would also cause the rhetoric of every other social movement to fall apart—if no natu-



ral rights exist, all of the arguments made for equality and equal claim to those rights become obsolete. Every decision made by the Supreme Court granting those rights to certain classes of individuals would be void. The conclusion Americans would be forced to draw is that Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and nearly every other beacon of hope and equality in the United States were all wrong about what it means to be free.

And yet, *Animal Liberation* is still the preeminent book used by animal rights activists in the United States. Most groups disagree with Singer on principle and on policy, and yet they encourage people to read Singer's work and still laud it as the foundational work of their movement. PETA, which is the largest animal rights group in the United States, employs the slogan that "animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way."<sup>19</sup> They oppose all instances of consuming animal byproducts, testing on animals, or using them for any purpose for human pleasure. But, Peter Singer, their champion and forefather, is not even a vegan, and explained in an interview that although he is always vegetarian, he will eat eggs or dairy when it is more convenient for him to do so.<sup>20</sup> Almost every animal rights group believes that it is categorically wrong to consume these products in any circumstance. The Animal Liberation Front, a radical organization that got its name from Singer's book, uses violent and illegal means to prevent animals from being held captive for any reason, most of all the production of food. And yet, they still consider a man who eats animal products to be their forefather.

Modern animal rights groups' advocacy is much more consistent with the work of Tom Regan, who was a professor of philosophy at North Carolina State University and who wrote several critically acclaimed books arguing for animal rights in the same period as Singer's early work. Regan supports the idea of natural rights and advocates giving them to animals, saying that animals possess moral rights because they are "subjects-of-a-life," which gives them the same inherent value as humans regardless of rational capacities.<sup>21</sup> The theory of inherent value would preclude animals from ever being used as a means to an end, including for human consumption. The philosophy of the modern animal rights movement is also in line with the work of Gary Francione, who is the Distinguished Professor of Law and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Scholar of Law and Philosophy

at Rutgers School of Law, and who began writing about animal rights in the 1990s. Francione argued that animals have one natural right, the right not to be the property of humans, and this framework would preclude eating meat, wearing fur, or experimenting on animals.<sup>22</sup> Singer did not advocate for an absolute ban on any of those things, and would in fact support testing on animals if it ultimately led to better utility. Both Regan's and Francione's arguments skirt the problem of equality with regard to natural rights, in that they show that rights are not contingent on rationality, and animals therefore do not need to be equal to have a desert claim. This allows their arguments to coexist with American ideals in a way that Singer's arguments cannot. Beyond being incompatible with American rhetoric, Singer's philosophy is also incompatible with the goals of the animal rights movement because he does not advocate for rights for anyone. But, PETA continues to propagate Singer's book above all others, including Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), or Francione's works *Animals, Property, and the Law* (1995) and *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation* (2008), all of which are more consistent with PETA's philosophy. All three authors are acclaimed philosophers, and Francione's and Regan's works could be integrated with the American framework of rights.

So why do Animal Rights groups not change the book that they advocate for, given that there are better options? Ingrid Newkirk, the founder of PETA, has said that "Animal Liberation, more than anything else, gave [her] the impetus to start PETA," and that reading it changed her life.<sup>23</sup> Therein lies the strength of Singer's work—it is persuasive. It does not matter if his work is consistent with the advocacy of the movement; what matters is that it convinces people to join the movement in the first place. Singer's arguments are intuitively appealing because on the surface the message of Animal Liberation is that suffering is bad. Readers are drawn in by this simple idea, and are then free to ignore his theories about how it fits into society and how it can be applied to the law. Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*, which has nine sections criticizing various ethical theories and their application to animals, does not have that emotional appeal. The work of authors like Regan and Francione is necessarily more complicated than Singer's because these authors actually take on the burden of integrating with the current conceptions of rights and

freedom that Singer simply ignores. If animal rights groups want to use an introductory piece of literature that is both consistent with their actual advocacy, and that can also be integrated with American ideals, they would need to throw new initiates into the middle of a complicated philosophical dilemma. Instead, they continue to propagate *Animal Liberation's* simple yet unattainable idea of how we can free animals. They count on Singer to win people's hearts, and then once people become interested in the idea of liberating animals, groups like PETA can come in and offer realistic advocacies and practical solutions. Just as he did for Newkirk, what Singer provides is the impetus to care.

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LAURA COUGHLIN is a linguistics major in the College of Arts and Sciences class of 2016. She is the president of the Boston University Debate Society, and competes proudly for BU every weekend at college tournaments around the country. This paper is partially dedicated to her team, both for helping her to strengthen her argumentation skills and for all of those late-night conversations wondering, "What are rights anyway?" and "Do animals even exist?". The other part is dedicated to Thomas Underwood, who helped her to translate strong argumentation into good writing.

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## From the Instructor

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Andrea Foster was a pre-med student who participated in my WR 150 class, “Piracy of the Atlantic! History, Archaeology, and Pop Culture.” In this course, we examined the golden age of piracy (1500s–1750s) in the Atlantic from both a historical and a fictional perspective. Through a variety of readings, our class looked at contemporary, eighteenth-century accounts of marauders, reports of excavated shipwrecks and pirate “lairs,” and modern, pop-cultural representations of pirates. Although the course was unrelated to her major, Andrea was very engaged with every aspect of it and was especially excited about writing this paper.

The assignment asked the class to design and propose a new research project around an ongoing and controversial excavation of a pirate shipwreck off the coast of Cape Cod. Specifically, they had to identify a research question that had yet to be answered and argue how their proposed project would provide a solution. The goal of the paper was to give students practice finding research questions as well as to show them that writing a research proposal requires the same strategies as writing an academic argument. Andrea chose to propose a forensic study of the bones from the shipwreck and argued that such a project could reveal a wealth of information about pirate health and healthcare. She went above and beyond in her research for this paper, addressing counter arguments that I had never thought of (like her discussion of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) and finding creative solutions to a complicated project. Her enthusiasm for the topic and the paper was apparent throughout the writing and editing process, and I think it is obvious in the final result. She clearly loved both the topic and the research and produced an exceptional paper.

— Kathryn Ness

WR 150: Pirates of the Atlantic: History, Archaeology, and Pop Culture

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## From the Writer

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I wrote “Crossbones: Forensic Osteology of the *Whydah* Pirates” in response to a request for a research proposal in Kate Ness’s WR 150 course. This particular course focused on the history and rumor of historic Atlantic pirates from a variety of sources, including literature, film, and the sole confirmed pirate wreck, the *Whydah*. Prompted by my interest in bio-medical sciences, I developed the project to help expose the typical pirate’s socioeconomic background before, during, and after engaging in piracy by utilizing modern forensic techniques on human bones found on site at the *Whydah*.

— Andrea Foster

**ANDREA FOSTER**

*Prize Essay Winner*

## **CROSSBONES: FORENSIC OSTEOLOGY OF THE *WHYDAH* PIRATES**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

For nearly 300 years, the *Whydah* wreckage was lost along the ever-changing New England coastline, until treasure hunter Barry Clifford located her remains off Cape Cod. Clifford's confirmation of the discovery of the *Whydah* in 1985<sup>1</sup> and his subsequent salvage techniques have led to such controversy that research on the only known pirate remains ever discovered<sup>2</sup> has been halted. However, analysis of the human remains would be invaluable to archaeologist and bio-archaeologists today. While scholars know that pirates had a historic form of health insurance,<sup>3</sup> very little is known about the quality of health care aboard a pirate ship due to the lack of confirmed pirate remains and bio-archaeological research. Since quality medical care requires education and training, the lack of quality medical care and the prevalence of childhood diseases, as determined by skeletal implications, would indicate poor socioeconomic standing of people who would later become pirates. Conversely, quality medical care and lack of childhood diseases could also shed light on the pre-pirate life of these people. I propose that human remains be excavated from the *Whydah* so that the bones may be used to analyze the general health and quality of medical care aboard a pirate ship. A team of highly skilled scientists will work in conjunction with bio-archaeologists to examine bones for implications of Rickets, osteoarthritis, and fracture remodeling.

### **2.0 The Team and Standard Operating Procedure**



Our expert team will consist of a forensic anthropologist, a forensic osteologist, and a bio-archaeologist. The forensic anthropologist and osteologist will work as a closely-knit team to form a detailed understanding of the human remains, and together will possess expert skill in hard tissue marks of age, sex, ancestry, stature, dental anatomy and variation, osseous and dental pathology, hard tissue indicators, and recognition of ante-, peri-, and postmortem injury.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the forensic osteologist will be very experienced in determining Native American remains purely by visual analysis in order to be compliant with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The bio-archaeologist will not only possess expert skill in osteometry, microscopy, and analysis,<sup>5</sup> but will also be skilled in ground search methods, excavation methods, artifact collection and preservation, and site recording.<sup>6</sup> All three of our experts will work in conjunction to determine the ante- and peri-mortem health of the deceased. Specifically, we will primarily examine skeletal remains for three health-related concerns: rickets, osteoarthritis, and set fractures. Rickets is indicative of childhood (pre-pirate) health,<sup>7</sup> osteoarthritis is indicative of adult (pirate) health,<sup>8</sup> and evidence of set bone fractures is indicative of quality medical care.

Our methodology will not only be compliant with any and all regulations regarding the exhumation of human remains, but it will also adhere to a strict Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) designed with the expert advice from our bio-archaeologist. Extremely detailed and clear reports will be fundamental to our SOP, and will largely account for the chain of custody of physical evidence, storage, and records of procedure. Detailed record keeping will also play a key role in sound bio-archaeology methods for tissue selection and skeletal autopsy procedures.

### **3.0 Ethics – Conservation and Native American Bones**

Boston University associate professor of archaeology Ricardo J. Elia describes three major components involved in ethical archaeology: conservation, rejection of commerciality, and permanent curation. While we must legally comply with all permitting requirements and restrictions involving human remains, we must consider our methodology in the light of ethical considerations as well. As stated by Elia, “compliance archaeology is not necessarily good archaeology.”<sup>9</sup> We aim to address Elia’s primary ethical

concerns and concerns relating to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in the following section.

While removing the bones is necessary for research, the context in which they are found can be preserved through meticulous use of photographic evidence and three-dimensional renderings. Furthermore, the nature of biological research, even with human remains, generally preserves a very large portion of the specimen. Our research will primarily involve observation and will not require decimation of the bones in any way. Following the conclusion of our research, the bones will be permanently curated in an appropriate facility.

Since one of the two survivors of the *Whydah* was Native American,<sup>10</sup> we have reason to believe that other Native Americans may have been on board. To combat this complication, we will begin by examining all documentation of all known records of the ship's personnel. Even in the event that no records indicate the presence of Native Americans, all further research with suspected Native American remains will be done in compliance with NAGPRA and a specialist will be consulted.

Lastly, Elia believes that the original salvage activities have threatened or even ruined any archaeological data to be obtained.<sup>11</sup> While it is true that the prop-washing technique used by Clifford has destroyed much of the contextual evidence, it did not destroy any of the bio-archaeological evidence. Even if prop-washing or other techniques damaged any of the bones, it is easy to separate these injuries from injuries obtained during life and it will not affect any of the other skeletal implications.

## **4.0 Bio-Archaeological Methods**

We will exhume as many human remains as possible and preserve them for continual scientific research. Increasing the sample size by increasing the number of exhumed bodies will also increase our overall understanding of the pre-pirate health, pirate health, and health care of the deceased by increasing the statistical significance of our findings. Following the conclusion of our research, the skeletal remains will be placed in permanent curation at a qualified facility.

## 4.1 Evidence of Quality Pre-Pirate Health – Rickets

Rickets has been identified in many populations of skeletal remains<sup>12</sup> and was historically a common ailment for impoverished children as late as the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> The bones of a rickets-affected person are smaller and weaker, and mechanical forces can deform the skeletal elements.<sup>14</sup> People who were affected by rickets in childhood are therefore also short in stature, as well as possibly deformed.<sup>15</sup> Since rickets is primarily a childhood disease,<sup>16</sup> we expect any indication of rickets is only an indication of pre-pirate health and socioeconomic standing.

Vitamin D deficiency causes rickets<sup>17</sup> and was especially prevalent in impoverished children. Calcium cannot be properly absorbed into the body without vitamin D, and, as such, rickets causes insufficient mineralization of newly-formed bone.<sup>18</sup> Unlike most vitamins, only an insignificant portion of vitamin D is consumed through food; it is instead synthesized in the body as a response to ultra-violet rays in sunlight that act on a chemical precursor in the skin.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, rickets is a better indicator of childhood socioeconomic standing, and possibly childhood indoor labor, than of diet. Pirates who had been affected by rickets as children will show bending deformation of the long bones (femur, tibia, etc) and will have flattening and bone porosity near the epicondyles (the knuckle of the bone).<sup>20</sup>

## 4.2 Evidence of Pirate Health –Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) has already been identified in the skeletal remains of several archaeological populations.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, specific movements and activities can be correlated to the location and severity of OA. For example, the skeletal remains of the Alaskan Inuit population show a much higher and much more severe expression of OA in the elbow as a result of hunting activities.<sup>22</sup> While these conclusions are only generalized hypotheses drawn from good correlations, they provide valuable insight to the physical activities and diets of pirate life. Diets poor in calcium lead to quicker progression into OA and poor health. Bones riddled with OA also become much more likely to fracture, leading to additional health problems.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative bone disease<sup>23</sup> and is directly linked to calcium intake.<sup>24</sup> Pirates who have been affected by osteoarthritis will have osteophytes (bone spurs), boney protrusions around the joint, the transformation of mature soft tissue into boney tissue, and an altered shape at the bone heads.<sup>25</sup>

### 4.3 Evidence of Pirate Health Care – Fracture Remodeling

Evidence of properly treated injuries is indicative of good health care by educated individuals. While it will be impossible to study soft tissue injuries, as the soft tissue will no longer exist, studying skeletal injuries will help determine whether pirates had the knowledge and skill to properly set a bone, perform an amputation, etc. It is imperative that skeletal evidence of trauma be separated into categories of ante-, peri-, and post-mortem injuries. Peri- and postmortem injuries are irrelevant to a study of the pirates' health care and education. Bone remodeling is a reliable indication of antemortem injuries<sup>26</sup> and will be used to determine the quality of post-injury care.

Remodeling begins to occur after only a few days and is distinguishable from perimortem or postmortem injuries by the presence of a fibrous matrix that provides structural framework for the initial boney callus deposits.<sup>27</sup> Recent antemortem injuries, such as those attained when the *Whydah* was first captured only a few days before she capsized, are even distinguishable from older antemortem injuries by the lack of a lamellar bone remodeling.<sup>28</sup> Thus, injuries attained during pirate life can be distinguished from those occurring before and those attained when the ship capsized.

### 4.4 Complications Associated with Marine Bio-Archaeology

Decomposition of human remains in salt water is highly variable<sup>29</sup> and poorly researched since most marine taphonomy research has been done as a byproduct of forensic casework.<sup>30</sup> Marine taphonomy research is further complicated since discovery of terrestrial and human remains at sea is very rare.<sup>31</sup> While our research will also contribute a wealth of knowledge to the field of marine taphonomy, what is already known indicates

that it is likely possible for skeletonized remains in sea water to be examined for forensic evidence.

Cold sea water decelerates decomposition,<sup>32</sup> and bodies that are trapped between decks would not only be protected from rapid decomposition but also from marine scavenging. It is likely that some cancellous bone, the porous inner bone, will be exposed, and it is still possible to determine ante-, peri-, and postmortem changes to the bone.<sup>33</sup> While no research has been done on remains trapped below water during the entire decomposition process,<sup>34</sup> at least one documented case describes intact bones found off the coast of Maine thirty-two years postmortem.<sup>35</sup> These remains have also demonstrated that bones incased in shoes and boots survive erosion for far greater periods of time than previously thought.<sup>36</sup> Given this evidence, we believe that it is possible to examine bones submerged in cold sea water, and possibly protected from scavengers, nearly three hundred years postmortem.

## 5.0 Overview

Bio-archaeological research of confirmed pirate skeletons would provide invaluable insight to a pirate's pre-pirate health, education, and socioeconomic standing as well as the effectiveness of their health care during pirate life. Since many pirates were former sailors, it is not unlikely that some were educated in dietary needs and/or care for injuries; however, it is also not unlikely that there was little health knowledge aboard a pirate ship, since many pirates had impoverished backgrounds. Forensic research of pirate bones will generate more insight on the socioeconomic background of those aboard a pirate ship, and, ideally, more pirate remains will be identified so that similar forensic research can be used to create significant research. Bones know all the answers and they never lie, but they must be examined before their truth can be heard.

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## From the Writer

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E.O. Wilson, often dubbed “the father of sociobiology,” co-authored a controversial article entitled “The Evolution of Eusociality,” which appeared in the popular scientific journal, *Nature*, in 2010. Waves of criticism followed its publication, including a review co-signed by 103 scientists, which criticized the article for condemning inclusive fitness theory and for failing to offer a suitable alternative. While Nowak et al. expose the limitations of inclusive fitness theory, they fail to provide an alternative mathematical model to describe altruistic evolution. Such mathematical models exist, most notably described by Nowak in *SuperCooperators*, but Nowak et al.’s failure to reference such models severely undermines the merit of their proposal.

— Julie Hammond

## EUSOCIALITY: A QUESTION OF MATHEMATICS OR BAD SCIENCE?

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In 2010, an article appeared in the popular scientific journal, *Nature*, which stirred up a stew of controversy within the scientific community. The article, “The Evolution of Eusociality”, written by Martin A. Nowak, Corina E. Tarnita, and Edward O. Wilson, questioned the usefulness of the theory of inclusive fitness. Inclusive fitness had been well accepted within the scientific community since its introduction in 1963, and many evolutionary biologists were reluctant to relinquish the cherished theory. Many scientists wrote to *Nature* in response to the article’s publication defending inclusive fitness theory and condemning Nowak et al. The most notable response, co-signed by 103 scientists, revealed that this indignation was widespread within the biology community. Despite this overwhelming consensus, much of the critics’ argumentation is flawed by their failure to acknowledge the counterexamples which inclusive fitness theory fails to explain. Due to its severe limitations, Nowak et al. are correct to renounce inclusive fitness theory, although their failure to provide an alternative mathematical framework weakens their analysis of eusocial evolution.

In plain terms, inclusive fitness and its counterpart, kin selection theory, refer to the theory that organisms “have evolved to favor others who are genetically related to them” (Baumeister). That is to say, that altruistic behavior arises from an evolutionary benefit from helping someone who shares a similar gene structure. The mathematical formula of this rule is called Hamilton’s Rule, which states that altruistic genes increase when

$$rB > C$$

where  $r$  is the genetic relatedness between the recipient and the actor of the altruistic act,  $B$  is the reproductive benefit gained by the recipient, and  $C$  is the reproductive cost to the actor (Molles 185).

This theory helped to explain many unanswered questions in the animal kingdom. For example, why would a bee sting a predator and die in the process to protect the hive if its own ability to reproduce was diminished by its suicide? This question can be explained by the “haplodiploid hypothesis” (Nowak et al. 1) which states that this altruistic behavior is due to the haplodiploidy of the bees. In haplodiploid organisms, unfertilized eggs develop into male bees, which makes their genetic relatedness to their siblings greater than their genetic relatedness to their mothers. Thus, due to the high coefficient of relatedness ( $r$ ), it becomes evolutionarily advantageous for the organism to sting the predator (thereby decreasing its ability to reproduce, aka “reproductive cost  $C$ ”) because it protects the hive (which thereby increases its ability to reproduce, aka “reproductive benefit  $B$ ”) (Gadagkar 159–180). Inclusive fitness’s ability to explain this otherwise unexplainable behavior gave rise to its acceptance within evolutionary biology.

While inclusive fitness explains altruistic behavior in haploid organisms such as bees and ants, it fails to explain the altruistic behavior of diploid organisms (those who reproduce similarly to humans, where both males and females have duplicate chromosomes which are a mixture of maternal and parental genes). In diploid organisms, the reproductive cost outweighs the benefits according to Hamilton’s Rule because the coefficient of relatedness is so low, and, following Hamilton’s Rule, the organism would not evolve to be altruistic. However, altruistic behavior is still seen in many diploid organisms, such as termites. Termites explode when threatened by a predator, a behavior similar to that of the bee’s stinger mechanism (Cormier). But, because the relatedness coefficient of the termite is too small to promote the altruistic gene, Hamilton’s Rule does not accurately depict the evolutionary history of termites. Following this logic, Nowak et al. are correct in claiming that inclusive fitness is severely limited, as it does not explain altruistic behavior across all species.

Despite this glaring fault of inclusive fitness theory, a number of scientists spoke up in its defense in response to Nowak et al.’s paper. The most notable response was co-signed by 103 scientists . . . a remarkably

large number of critics (Abbot et al.). They argued that Nowak et al. were wrong to suggest a sharp distinction between inclusive fitness theory and natural selection. “Natural selection explains the appearance of design in the living world, and inclusive fitness theory explains what this design is for” (Abbot et al.). This definition—for which the authors failed to supply a source—is extremely weak because it is vague: many theories exist to explain the appearance of design in the living world, intelligent design for example. Usually, “standard natural selection” refers to the theory proposed by Charles Darwin in his book, *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin, anticipating the use of altruistic behavior as a counterargument to his theory, included a section in his book addressing this issue and offered that an entire group of organisms may be thought of as the evolving specimen (157–159). This sounds exactly like what Nowak et al. propose, where a population of organisms may be viewed as a whole in terms of their evolution. So, if we are to assume “standard natural selection” to be that which was proposed by Charles Darwin, then his theories in fact support Nowak et al. and weaken the argument of Abbott et al.

Despite this fault, some of their arguments are valid. They write, “[Nowak et al. are] incorrect to say that inclusive fitness requires a number of ‘stringent assumptions’ such as pairwise interactions, weak selection, linearity, additivity, and special population structures” (Abbot et al.). They cite several sources which correspond with recent scientific studies that have endeavored to make a more general form of Hamilton’s rule. While they are right to correct Nowak et al., this “general form” is still not general enough to explain the behavior of the termites. This is because while the “general form” no longer requires pairwise interactions or weak selection, it still cannot account for when genetic relatedness is low. Thus, it still cannot explain altruistic behavior in termites and other diploid organisms. They are so focused on clinging to inclusive fitness that they fail to acknowledge its limitations of predicting the proliferation of altruistic genes in *all* organisms.

Another of their arguments is flawed in its philosophy. They claim that “inclusive fitness has facilitated, not hindered, empirical testing of evolutionary theory” (Abbot et al.). On the surface, this seems perfectly fine, because “testing” sounds very scientific . . . But, by definition, a theory cannot be tested. If it can be tested, it is a law (Helmenstine). Both inclu-

sive fitness and natural selection are only theories. Abbot et al.'s claim that inclusive fitness has facilitated empirical testing of evolutionary theory is therefore invalid. By "testing of evolutionary theory," one may hypothesize their meaning to have been that experiments have shown results which fit with the predictions of inclusive fitness theory. While this coincidence may lend support, *it does not prove the theory*. This concept can be difficult to grasp, so a parallel situation may be considered for the reader's benefit. Just as advocates of inclusive fitness argue that events such as bacteria becoming resistant to antibiotics are evidence of evolution, advocates of theism claim that events such as a person suddenly being healed are evidence of God. While this occurrence may lend support, this does not *prove* the existence of God. Similarly, experiments can lend support for, but cannot *prove* evolutionary theory, nor can they prove inclusive fitness theory.

While a theory cannot be proved, it can be *disproved*. If observations in the physical world do not match that which is predicted, then the theory is no longer credible (Helmenstine). Again, any diploid organism that displays altruistic behavior (such as the termite) provides a strong counterexample to inclusive fitness theory, thereby disproving it. While genetic relatedness may be a factor in the proliferation of altruistic behavior, inclusive fitness theory as it exists today is disproved. Following this logic, Nowak et al. are correct in denouncing inclusive fitness theory.

Another article critiquing "The Evolution of Eusociality" claims that Nowak et al. are committing a fallacy by claiming that "family structure can be replaced by any form of population structure . . . given the lack of empirical evidence." The source given here is E.O. Wilson's book *The Insect Societies*. It is unclear to what empirical evidence they are referring, but since Wilson wrote the book listed as their source, it would be reasonable to assume that Wilson has the authority on this topic. Wilson is one of the authors of "The Evolution of Eusociality," so it would follow that he would be aware of any lack of empirical evidence supporting family structure being replaced by population structure when he wrote the controversial article. The question becomes: is there a lack of empirical evidence on this topic, and does a lack of evidence disprove a theory? Usually, a lack of evidence is not enough to disprove a theory; a counterexample is needed. So, this argument becomes irrelevant because the "lack of empirical evi-

dence” is too vague to adequately convey its significance, and, even if there were no evidence, the theory would still be considered valid.

E. O. Wilson, often dubbed as “the father of sociobiology,” has written extensively on a variety of topics, ranging from entomology to environmentalism (“E.O. Wilson Biography”). In *Letters to a Young Scientist*, Wilson laments that excessive mathematics deter many young adults from pursuing scientific careers, and calls for more qualitative descriptions in scientific journals. Convinced that less mathematics would reach a wider audience, it is possible that Wilson persuaded Nowak et al. to forego a mathematical description in favor of a qualitative description. Another possible explanation concerning Nowak et al.’s lack of mathematics is that such a mathematical description would necessitate a paper much longer than that of a standard scientific article. Regardless of the reason, the absence of a mathematical model weakens Nowak et al.’s argument, as their criticism of Hamilton’s Rule is incomplete without offering a quantitative alternative. It is unfortunate that Nowak et al. fail to include this quantitative analysis, as Martin Nowak has clearly derived these concepts in *SuperCooperators: Altruism, Evolution, and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*, where he describes the evolution of altruism using game theory. While calculus and statistics are standards in the biology curriculum, advanced mathematical topics like game theory are often overlooked (Dionne). As a result, it is possible many of Nowak et al.’s critics had insufficient background knowledge to properly evaluate the article. It is unfortunate that Nowak et al. do not reference *SuperCooperators* in their article, as much controversy could have been avoided had such a reference been provided.

Indeed, a lack of sufficient background knowledge seems to be at the root of the controversy. In the article co-signed by 103 scientists, the last paragraph may be a reflection of the critics’ inability to translate Nowak et al.’s qualitative proposal to a quantitative model: “Ultimately, any body of biological theory must be judged on its ability to make novel predictions and explain biological phenomena; we believe that Nowak et al. do neither” (Abbot et al.). This is unnecessarily pessimistic, as cost and benefit calculations associated with game theory have been extremely successful in explaining many situations, and are often employed by actuaries as well as anyone attempting risk analysis. Indeed, these cost and

benefit calculations are not so different from the assumptions of the critics' beloved inclusive fitness theory, where  $C$  is the cost and  $B$  is the benefit in Hamilton's Rule. The difference between inclusive fitness theory and game theory is that, in game theory, the entire population is taken as a system, whereas inclusive fitness theory studies only an individual organism. But, when evolution involves many organisms interacting and mating with one another, why should the population not be taken as a system? It is true that there are often too many organisms within a population to perform such a calculation by hand. So, had the use of game theory been proposed in the 1960's when Hamilton proposed inclusive fitness theory, game theory may have been less useful because there would have been too many variables to perform such a calculation. But, this is no longer the case, as computers today are capable of such calculations. Consequently, the argument that Nowak et al.'s proposition is unable to make novel predictions regarding biological phenomena is invalid.

Matt Zimmerman, an evolutionary biologist at U.C. Davis, argues that the controversy stems not only from a mathematical misunderstanding, but also from differing definitions of Hamilton's Rule. Nowak et al. focus on the limitations and counterexamples of Hamilton's Rule, generalizing Hamilton's Rule to be the mathematical description of inclusive fitness theory (Zimmerman). The critics, on the other hand, generalize inclusive fitness theory to be more than Hamilton's Rule, and take inclusive fitness theory to be the concept that altruistic genes are more likely to be evolved if the coefficient of genetic relatedness is high. Zimmerman proposes that the critics fail to recognize that Nowak et al. are *not* proposing that relatedness never has anything to do with altruism, but rather that this theory only works in a limited number of cases, and a more general theory should exist to explain more forms of behavior. Zimmerman offers that this sharp divide in opinion is not a reflection of either party's scientific prowess, but rather is due to a difference in definitions.

In summary, Nowak et al. are correct in their claims regarding the limitations of Hamilton's Rule and inclusive fitness theory, but are so vague in their promotion of game theory that it is unsurprising that their article met such a negative response. With further mathematical explanations of their proposal, namely Nowak's *SuperCooperators*, their proposal of the use of game theory with regard to evolutionary biology should



stimulate further research into evolutionary processes, especially with the use of computer simulations. Criticism of “The Evolution of Eusociality” is largely philosophical in nature, and much of the critics’ argumentation is flawed. Today, few articles are being published today which continue to renounce their ideas. Just as *On the Origin of Species* was initially extremely controversial but became the cornerstone of modern evolutionary biology, so too will “The Evolution of Eusociality” eventually come to be accepted by the scientific community.

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## From the Instructor

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Tom Laverriere wrote “Cross-dressing in Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion* and Europe’s Wartime Masculinity” for Studio 112, a WR 150 equivalent offered by the Kilachand Honors College. The assignment asked students to explore a question that in some way touched on the theme of the course, “Modernism and Its Discontents.” Tom conceptualized and researched this paper entirely on his own, beginning with an annotated bibliography and prospectus, then moving through a series of drafts. His intellectual curiosity drove the project from beginning to end.

Tom’s paper takes up a question that many viewers of the film are likely to share: What’s the deal with the cross-dressing number in the middle of this classic war film? He addresses this focused textual question through a broad inquiry into the complex and ambiguous possibilities surrounding masculine expression in wartime Europe. One thing I admire greatly about the paper is the way in which it engages with the work of a variety of other scholars. Tom draws on theoretical concepts alongside historical background to offer a compelling framework for understanding the questions that the film raises about masculinity through its portrayal of cross-dressing. He also builds upon several related arguments, adding to the scholarly conversation in a generous and generative way that will leave readers with renewed interest in what is widely considered one of the greatest films ever made.

— Sarah Madsen Hardy

KHC ST 112: Studio 2

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## From the Writer

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Towards the end of second semester in our Honors College Writing Studio course, KHC ST112, Sarah Madsen Hardy asked us to write research papers on any topic we wanted concerning any of the texts we had worked with. As a Film & TV major, I knew I wanted to write about the film we watched (Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*), but as a writer with the dangerous habit of trying to tackle huge concepts in very limited spaces, the freedom I had was terrifying. We could write about anything. I eventually decided I wanted to better understand the intentions behind and implications of Renoir's presentation of cross-dressing in the film and what that might say about Europe's concept of masculinity during the World War I era. With some coaching from Sarah I found success after paring down my scope and spending a lot of time on a single moment—a moment of silence, at that—that I could use research to interpret and explain.

Thus, what would become my final paper was born, and what I found was incredibly exciting. In reading both scholarship about the film and historical studies of the period, I had my eyes opened to the rich history of Europe's queer subculture of the early twentieth century and the extent to which cross-dressing was a part of it. Nontraditional gender expression, even as we know it today, isn't new; what's new is the vocabulary that's continuing to become socially accepted that allows us to talk about it. Many thanks to Sarah for being there every step of the way and for encouraging me to listen to the silence.

— Thomas Laverriere

THOMAS LAVERRIERE

*Prize Essay Award*

## CROSS-DRESSING IN RENOIR'S *LA GRANDE ILLUSION* AND EUROPE'S WARTIME MASCULINITY

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The military is associated with a masculine ideal, so much so that enlisting may be the ultimate demonstration by a young man of his masculinity. Such was the case in Europe at the outbreak of World War I. In 1914, the conflict was anticipated to be short and sweet, more of an adventure than the total war that ensued. Men volunteered because they feared they might otherwise be missing the opportunity of a lifetime. In the excitement of war fervor, however, and even long after the dust of the Great War has settled, few stop to think about what kind of masculinity the military promoted during this time. The military may be viewed as a standard of masculinity even today, but there are pieces of the military culture of World War I that may not fit with contemporary thought about masculinity in the period. Jean Renoir's 1937 film *La Grande Illusion* offers a more complete picture of this masculinity. This includes a depiction of cross-dressing, a facet of masculinity seldom explored by historians. But where does this fit into the picture of wartime masculinity, and what did it do for men? Using theories presented by Nicholas Edsall and Alon Rachamimov, Renoir's representation of cross-dressing in a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp may be analyzed and explained in terms of masculine expression and used to comment on Europe's changing definition of masculinity during wartime.

### Setting the Scene

Renoir shows cross-dressing as a commonplace behavior for men at war, which already challenges common perceptions of masculinity. In

the film's first act, Renoir presents two of the film's leads, Rosenthal and Maréchal, along with Maisonneuve, an actor, a teacher, and an engineer, all Allied officers preparing to stage a theatrical production to entertain their fellow prisoners of war at a German camp. The scene opens with the six men looking through crates of supplies for the show. They are all excited to find "real dresses," and begin talking about women back home—how they've started wearing their dresses and hair short—before Maréchal suggests that the actor try on one of the dresses so they can see how it looks. At this point, Rosenthal intervenes; he insists that the cross-dressing be done in the best way possible (that is, only a man who has "shaved properly" may dress up) (Renoir 38). That man is Maisonneuve. Maisonneuve agrees, saying, "If you think that's funny," and disappears to make his transformation (Renoir 38).

Maisonneuve returns fully dressed as a woman, wig and all, and is met with silence from his comrades. Renoir describes the scene in the screenplay: "All the men turn to look at him and fall silent, curiously disturbed. How many memories and hopes are there. . . . Maisonneuve feels uneasy to see their intense looks on him" (Renoir 39). The scene continues,

MARÉCHAL, *with forced laughter*: Don't you think it's funny?

MAISONNEUVE: Funny?

ROSENTHAL: Yes, it's funny . . .

MARÉCHAL, *very sane and a little sad*: It's really funny . . . you look like a real girl.

*They fall into a heavy silence again. . . . They cannot find anything to say as they look at this soldier in a woman's dress. Very slow pan across the soldiers' faces staring at MAISONNEUVE in absolute silence . . .*

VOICES *off*: Yes . . . it's funny! (Renoir 39)

Renoir writes tension into the screenplay, and this translates on screen. This tension is ambiguous, however; it's clear from the soldiers' dialogue before Maisonneuve appears dressed as a woman that they are becoming frustrated with being isolated from "real" women. The soldiers appear awestruck because Maisonneuve looks so convincing, but they are all fully cognizant that he is still a man. Yet they allow themselves to be taken

aback and admire him. Given the film's theme of male camaraderie, too, this scene may be read in a homoerotic light. This opens the question of whether Renoir presents cross-dressing as a normative behavior for the soldiers, something to help them reaffirm their own masculinities by enjoying the company of a "woman," or a disruptive behavior that allowed queer expression.

## Contextualizing Cross-dressing in Modern European History

Before we can make sense of what standard of masculinity Renoir applies to cross-dressing, we need to first understand the role of cross-dressing in European culture in the early twentieth century and its place in shaping concepts of masculinity. In his book *Toward Stonewall: Homosexuality and Society in the Modern Western World*, historian Nicholas C. Edsall introduces a cultural struggle in Europe between classical (Greek and Roman) and Western (Christian) theories of masculinity (189). Westernization and the spread of Christianity brought with them a new vision of masculinity that forbade anything bordering on homoerotic; this was a part of the ascetic ideal that Friedrich Nietzsche condemned. Strong male friendships became dangerous to one's reputation. The outbreak of World War I, though, produced extremely strong male bonds that often included homoerotic undertones and sometimes resulted in homosexual encounters. These bonds between men were accepted and encouraged according to the classical model of masculinity. Though homosexual love wasn't necessarily socially acceptable, strong friendships between powerful men were supported under classical ideology because people believed these relationships helped improve society.

In order to answer the question of where Renoir's portrayal of cross-dressing fits into this dichotomy of masculinities, it is important to note the history of the practice of cross-dressing and how that may have fit (or not) into men's identities during this period. Cross-dressing had been a part of a growing queer subculture in Europe for years prior to the outbreak of the War (Edsall 147). An example of cross-dressing and suspicions of homosexuality entering a public forum that illustrates the complexity the issue of masculinity involves would be Kaiser Wilhelm II and his friend Phillip, Fürst zu Eulenburg. The two were part of the same social circle, comprised of many men who were suspected to be homosex-

ual, and sometimes their meetings would include cross-dressing as a social activity (Edsall 147). Later, after both had achieved political power, Phillip was accused of having passed secret information on to the French after the French penetration of Morocco. His suspected homosexuality was used against him in trial (Edsall 148–49).

So, like the military of the early twentieth century, German culture during that time encouraged the strong male bonds between Wilhelm and his friends (classical ideology) until behaviors that suggested homosexuality became public—at which point they were condemned (Christian ideology). This example from pre-War Germany highlights the conflicting ideas facing men of the period that only became more defined as the War set men up to face the issue head-on within the institution of the military, which has always been held up as an inherently masculine system.

This would have to be done privately, however; as Sarah Cole puts it in her book *Modernism, Male Intimacy, and the Great War*, the common intense male friendships, sometimes bordering on the homoerotic, were a “crushing problem” because of the soldiers’ inability to speak of them. Soldiers couldn’t talk about their relationships due to both (Christian/Western) cultural pressures and a lack of the right words; this restrictive feeling for men necessitated the creation of a “hidden language” with which to talk about them (Cole 470, 473). To do this, soldiers turned to classical Greek texts or the Bible for help in creating their own vocabulary. Despite how common these relationships were during World War I, the new space the military provided for these men “could not ultimately resolve the contradictions inherent in the different visions of male unity that the war generated” (470).

Though Cole further illuminates the contradictory nature of soldiers’ freedom and restriction of expression during World War I, we’re still faced with a conflicted view of masculinity. How might we understand cross-dressing in this murky context? As a behavior endorsed by the military, one could consider cross-dressing a manifestation of a “hidden language” for homoerotic expression within the military’s restrictive framework. “This was the golden age of the female impersonator,” said POW memoirist Hermann Pörzgen, “when unfulfilled eroticism . . . reoriented the fantasies of the mass [of soldiers] toward a new object and channeled love, sorrow, adulation, and critique” (Rachamimov 363). Officers of POW camps fully



supported and encouraged performances by men in drag, even encouraged some men to keep up their female personas when they weren't performing (Rachamimov 377). Such men would receive love letters from other soldiers; sometimes soldiers would do their laundry for them and pamper them as they would a female lover—whether they were romantically or sexually involved or not.

The military officials' reasoning appeared to be that if the prisoners got their fix of femininity, they would be less likely to have sexual encounters with the other men. They used cross-dressing, which had roots in queer expression, as a normalizing behavior to promote a more Christian masculinity. They may not have realized that by accepting cross-dressing, they accepted the primarily queer history that came with it. Though the prisoners wanted to see the most feminine-looking performers possible—more evidence in favor of cross-dressing as a normative behavior—they still, like the soldiers in *La Grande Illusion*, became transfixed. These men knew they were watching and interacting with other men. The maintenance of female personas offstage by some men, though, blurred the line between the sexes and even called pronouns into question. What the military believed to be a way of upholding Westernized notions of masculinity may have had the inverse effect on some of the men by giving them an outlet for homoerotic desires and a place to explore them in a classical style.

### *Analysis of La Grande Illusion*

What, then, does this mean for *La Grande Illusion*? Some scholars who have written on this scene have analyzed it as evidence of Renoir's fascination with the theatre arts; additionally, scenes depicting plays weren't uncommon in 1930s cinema. Keith Reader provides a more insightful reading of the film in his article "If I Were a Girl—And I Am Not" that ranks questions surrounding cross-dressing in league with nationalism and social class, hugely important themes in the film. Reader makes this comparison by noting another instance of cross-dressing as a strategy Maréchal uses in one of his escape plans (56). He tries to escape three times: once as a chimney sweep, once as a German soldier, and once as a woman. Relatedly, Reader cites Celia Britton who says, "The drag show is the most obvious visual correlate to the theme of illusion" (56).

Thus, despite its short screen time, cross-dressing may be an integral part of Renoir's vision. Reader's interpretation assesses the "illusion" of cross-dressing as neither a reaffirmation of heterosexual norms nor an outright refutation of them, but rather a form in which both may coexist.

Edsall's notion of competing masculine ideologies (the classical and the Christian) and Rachamimov's exploration of cross-dressing as a normative or disruptive behavior may shed more light on Reader's interpretation and better explain Renoir's portrayal of cross-dressing in the film in context. Since the film shows the theatrical performance that included cross-dressing as endorsed by the camp, it seems to promote cross-dressing as a normative behavior, yet the tension between the soldiers when *Maisonneuve* emerges as a woman suggests that dressing up could have been an expression of a more disruptive classical masculinity. To be sure, Renoir's vision of cross-dressing isn't necessarily normative and Christian *or* disruptive and classical, but the notion that the military could use drag as a normative behavior (for Christian values) that results in the expression of classical masculinity seems paradoxical. Can one really classify the military's endorsement of cross-dressing as normative if its support creates a space for socially disruptive homoerotic expression?

Instead, one may say that Renoir captures the subjectivity of the experience of cross-dressing. It was normative/Christian for the military officials that endorsed it in the POW camps and on the front lines, but disruptive/classical for many of the soldiers that participated. Looking more critically at the reactions of the soldiers to *Maisonneuve*, one can see the disruptive nature of his cross-dressing. The soldiers insist that it's funny, but the silence before the laughter shows the soldiers' uncertainty of their feelings and how to express them. They have to insist that it's just for fun to either confirm their longing for a biological woman or repress their longing for a man. What Renoir doesn't show us is that some of the characters at this performance would have likely had some sort of homosexual encounter(s) at the camp or on the fronts, and cross-dressing may confuse soldiers' feelings, romantic or sexual or not. Viewing the film through a homoerotic lens is validated by the relationship of *Maréchal* and *Rosenthal*; at the end of the film *Maréchal* chooses to continue traveling with *Rosenthal* instead of settling down with his female love interest. This friendship between the men is never sexual, but it illustrates the kinds of

bonds men formed with homoerotic undertones. The representation of cross-dressing is highly ambiguous, but so were the soldiers' feelings about themselves and each other—and this is the point.

Given the strong male relationships showcased throughout the film and that events are portrayed almost exclusively from the prisoners' perspective, one may be inclined to accept their perception of cross-dressing: a disruptive behavior that embraces classical masculinity. The homoerotic tension in the film aligns with classical masculinity, but whether Renoir presents cross-dressing as normative or disruptive is less clear. Since the military culture is such a large part of the film, it makes sense to say that its depiction of cross-dressing is normative even though the soldiers use the behavior to adhere more closely to classical masculinity. The ambiguity, however, shows that Renoir didn't ignore the homoerotic and homosexual implications of cross-dressing, and as such, its disruptive potential. We see cross-dressing through the soldiers' eyes, but in the context of the military. Therefore, Renoir shows his audience more of the normative than the disruptive side of cross-dressing.

The secondary, disruptive potential of cross-dressing, however, could be yet another of Renoir's illusions. Setting the film in its historical context with a focus on the various and changing functions of cross-dressing, largely from the homosexual community, opens doors to new interpretations of Renoir's depiction of cross-dressing in *La Grande Illusion* that at the very least establish the scene's authenticity as a part of the larger experience of war. It wasn't simply a throwaway scene showing Renoir's personal interest in theater, but another moment of character study and world building. Perhaps the film itself acted as part of a "hidden language" like the one Cole describes to explore homoeroticism in a non-explicit way. There is something to be said of the film's ambiguity, but its portrayal of a classical ideal of masculinity is clear. If cross-dressing fit into the final cut of Renoir's film and has (albeit slowly) begun attracting the attention of historians and gender scholars, how this behavior fits into a picture of masculinity is a conversation worth having. When the illusions are stripped away, the findings may be surprising.

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## From the Instructor

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Our class, WR 150: “Global Documentary,” examines how Western filmmakers represent foreign cultures and how international filmmakers represent their country's social and historical moments. Students analyze a range of modern documentaries, including the controversial *Born into Brothels* (2004), the instant classic *The Act of Killing* (2013), and the genre-bending satire that inspired Hannah Pangrcic’s prize-winning essay—*Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006).

I always give students open essay prompts: ask and answer a question about any of our films. For Paper 3, I encouraged students to pose a question that felt especially urgent to them. My hope was that students—motivated not only intellectually, but also emotionally—would experiment more with style and tone this time. To prepare, we read the essay “Fascinating Fascism,” Susan Sontag’s seminal attack on Leni Riefenstahl, the filmmaker reputed to be Hitler’s favorite. Inspired, students set their goals for Paper 3: to be hostile but not hysterical; to strike a balance between emotion and evidence.

For Hannah, the guidelines were liberating. Already a confident writer, she designed a research project with the kind of expansive argument that only someone well-versed in the scholarship can make. By drafting a topnotch prospectus, she came upon the topic and shape of her argument early in the process, using the questionable ethics of *Borat* to position all documentaries as art largely free of ethical constraints. While revising her draft (which she wrote in daily, two-page increments), she focused on deepening her analysis and presenting her positions more precisely. Hannah threw herself into this superb essay, and I have no doubt that even Sontag would call it a “Grrrrrrreat success!”

— Marisa Milanese

WR 150: Global Documentary

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## From the Writer

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Before I even began the process of writing “*Borat: Controversial Ethics for Make Better the Future of Documentary Filmmaking*,” I knew that Sacha Baron Cohen, creator of *Borat*, had received much negative criticism for the documentary. Yet, I had thoroughly enjoyed watching the film each time, appreciating Cohen’s satire despite its often offensive nature. When I began researching, I found a lack of consensus about the standards on which much of the negative criticism was established.

For my essay, I explored the ethical expectations often applied to documentaries and how Cohen’s documentary fit (or rather, *didn’t* fit) into such ideas. I found it a simple task to argue that *Borat* was, by the aforementioned expectations, an unethical film—it was far more difficult to develop the idea that these expectations are unnecessarily restrictive, and that we should allow filmmakers more freedom in creating their works. I ultimately aimed to expand upon and challenge the ideas I had learned in class, and to suggest beneficial alternatives to the regulation of documentary filmmaking.

— Hannah Pangrcic

HANNAH PANGRCIC

*Prize Essay Award*

## **BORAT: CONTROVERSIAL ETHICS FOR MAKE BETTER THE FUTURE OF DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING**

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This paper will explore the many criticisms of the film *Borat* and the flaws in the standards on which these criticisms were based. Drawing upon the expectations of documentary filmmaking as defined by scholars such as Calvin Pryluck and Jay Ruby, this paper will first introduce the subject of documentary ethics and then delve into *Borat's* position in relation to the defined ethical limitations. Rather than denounce the film along with its critics, this paper will use *Borat* as a conduit for a discussion of the greater issue of the ethical guidelines of documentaries and how they are currently ambiguous and unnecessary. Ultimately, this paper will argue that instead of defining more explicit guidelines, we should consider documentary filmmakers as artists and their documentaries as art, and allow them, within moral reason, the creative freedom that these titles imply.

*Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, a documentary by Sacha Baron Cohen, does not simply cross lines; it plays hopscotch with them. In the film, renowned comedic actor and writer Baron Cohen plays the role of Borat, a news reporter from Kazakhstan who travels across America “to learn a lessons for Kazakhstan,” which he proclaims in a fake “Kazakh” accent. Throughout his journey, Borat finds himself at odds with American culture, and vice versa. Much of the film is dominated by awkward and downright absurd interactions between Borat and several Americans who are unaware of Borat’s fictional nature. The results of this misinformation constitute many of the film’s most offensive and, consequently, most criticized scenes. Many people, including several featured in *Borat*, decry the filmmakers’

lack of informed consent in that they purposely kept secret the fact that Borat was an invented character. Many also find fault in the film's misogynistic and racist portrayal of Kazakhstan, as well as in Borat's frequent anti-Semitic remarks. These criticisms all stem from the notion that, as a documentary, *Borat* neglects the numerous ethical obligations suggested by scholars of documentary filmmaking. Despite the somewhat ambiguous boundary between what is ethical and what is not, notably in documentary filmmaking, *Borat* pushes so many limits that it would be nigh impossible to deem it a morally-upstanding film. However, rather than discredit the film, its blatant disregard of ethical limitations suggests that the expectations we have of documentaries are too restrictive, and that they limit the filmmaker's freedom to create what is ultimately a form of art.

While ideas regarding documentary ethics differ from scholar to scholar, there exists a general accord about concepts such as informed consent. In the words of Randolph Lewis, a professor of cinema studies, informed consent represents the "notion that producers must divulge the full nature of the project to the people being interviewed" (80). Calvin Pryluck, one of the first scholars to discuss documentary ethics, would agree, claiming that "consent is flawed when obtained by the omission of any fact that might influence the giving or withholding of permission." In other words, subjects who had given their consent may not have done so if they had known the full extent of the project to which they consented. Almost forty years after Pryluck began writing about informed consent, Willemien Sanders, a professor of media studies, acknowledges that the notion is still regarded as an essential part in creating ethical documentaries. As one of few ideas upon which scholars of documentaries can agree, informed consent has provided a foundation for documentary ethics for quite some time.

Since Pryluck first began discussing the expectations of documentaries, the perceived standards have greatly expanded, covering areas beyond informed consent. Jay Ruby, a leader in the field of visual anthropology, assigns the responsibilities of a documentary filmmaker to three parties: responsibilities toward the film, toward the participant, and toward the audience. Ruby states that in fulfilling the responsibility toward the film, the filmmaker should produce an image that is a "true reflection of the intention in making the image in the first place" (310)—in other words,



a filmmaker should be faithful to the message they intend to convey. A responsibility to the participant implies the need for informed consent, and a responsibility toward the audience is the necessity to “guarantee the truth” (Sanders 546) throughout the documentary. Bill Nichols, perhaps the most prolific scholar of documentary film, agrees with Ruby, saying that filmmakers have the responsibility “to make his or her argument as accurate and convincing as possible” (Sanders 544)—to reconcile as best they can the sometimes conflicting interests between accuracy and persuasion.

By the aforementioned ethical standards, *Borat* is most assuredly an unethical film. In fact, a lack of informed consent is what enables this film to exist—the filmmakers knew that the consent they had obtained was not at all “informed;” a more appropriate term would be “deformed consent” (Lewis 80), since they deceived the interviewees through convoluted legal documents and the dishonest perpetuation of Borat as a real person. Thus, *Borat* purposely ignores the very basis of documentary ethics. What the film does do, however, is fulfill its “responsibility toward the film.” Baron Cohen and his fellow filmmakers went to great lengths to ensure a finished product that would properly reflect their purpose in making the documentary, as articulated in one of the few interviews in which Cohen does not appear in character: “Borat essentially works as a tool . . . by himself being anti-Semitic, he lets people lower their guard and expose their own prejudice” (Strauss). Nevertheless, in satisfying this one responsibility to the greatest extent, the other two responsibilities that Ruby suggests suffer. The responsibility to the participants suffers from a lack of informed consent, and the responsibility to the audience hardly seems fulfilled—Borat does not “guarantee the truth” about anything, especially considering its false depiction of the nation of Kazakhstan. (Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry even threatened to sue Baron Cohen for his “derogatory” (Wolf) portrayal of the country, attesting to the considerable extent of the film’s misrepresentation.) *Borat’s* disregard of the most basic ethical expectations leaves little doubt as to the film’s unethical nature.

The unethical nature of *Borat* may be certain, yet the expectations by which we determine this contain some ambiguity. Informed consent is assumed to be an imperative in documentary filmmaking, yet even Pryluck considers the following question: “[w]hat is the boundary between

society's right to know and the individual's right to be free of humiliation, shame, and indignity?" (24). He questions if there are situations in which the ethical treatment of subjects is less important than the knowledge society could gain through what many would consider unethical treatment. Sacha Baron Cohen would likely argue that his documentary presents one of these situations, yet rather than attempt to expose some hidden truth about, for example, large-scale corruption within the government, his documentary concerns the sometimes-offensive views of a select few Americans. Still, the ambiguity exists. Pryluck also mentions that "film-makers can only guess how the scenes they use will affect the lives of the people they have photographed" (23). A filmmaker can consider every side of an issue, consult every person featured in their documentary, make every attempt to anticipate the consequences of including or excluding certain scenes, and still face criticism—a filmmaker can make their best educated guess, but it is still merely a guess. Thus, it is quite challenging to satisfy the three responsibilities. A filmmaker could satisfy their responsibility to their subjects by removing a scene, and inadvertently offend an audience member by not including it. In reality, a balance among the three responsibilities is impossible to achieve, since there are an interminable number of factors to consider within each responsibility.

Many of those who criticize *Borat* and its creators fail to recognize the conflicting factors in the standards by which they judge the film. For example, following the film's release, the government of Kazakhstan was largely unamused, banning sales of the DVD and threatening to sue Baron Cohen. And with good reason—in one scene, Borat even describes to a humor coach the "funny retardation" of his brother, whom Borat's family supposedly keeps in a cage. He follows this statement up with a story about how his brother once escaped his cage and raped his sister. Borat's obscene stories, which he tells to people with presumably little familiarity with Kazakhstan, portray the country as misogynistic, incestuous, and ableist. Cohen counters criticism of his offensive portrayal by saying, "[t]he joke is not on Kazakhstan. I think the joke is on people who can believe that the Kazakhstan that I describe can exist" (Strauss). And yet, his defense became somewhat unnecessary, since the country later retracted much of its criticism of the film due to its positive effect on the country's tourism industry. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, a Kazakh foreign minister, even

thanked Borat “for attracting tourists to Kazakhstan” (Kilner) and ultimately bringing more global recognition to the country. In the end, the country owes its newfound prosperity to the film it once condemned. We can apply Pryluck’s question to this situation—where is the boundary between society’s right to know the true Kazakhstan and the benefits that resulted from the false representation of Kazakhstan as seen in *Borat*? The government of Kazakhstan would have initially argued that no circumstance could justify Borat’s unethical portrayal of Kazakhstan; that is, until the unforeseen economic benefits of the film were realized. This switch in Kazakh attitude towards *Borat* attests to some of the ambiguity surrounding Pryluck’s question and its fundamental nature—a boundary that one can readily step over to switch sides, as Kazakhstan did, suggests that such a boundary is hardly necessary in the first place, despite the insistence by scholars of documentary ethics that these boundaries need to exist.

For others, the film is not so easily forgiven. Among the most criticized aspects of the film is Borat’s anti-Semitism. In the beginning of the film, Borat reports on the “Running of the Jew,” in which Kazakhs run from goblin-like figures meant to represent Jewish people. Of course, such an event does not actually occur in Kazakhstan, nor do most citizens of the country hold such anti-Semitic views. However, the Anti-Defamation League expressed concern that “the audience may not be sophisticated enough to get the joke, and some may even find it reinforcing their bigotry” (Muravchik 36). In his review of the film, Joshua Muravchik defends Borat’s anti-Semitism, stating that “[t]he old, superstitious belief that Jews sprout horns or poison wells—the focus of Baron Cohen’s satire—no longer cuts deep, and certainly not in [America]” (47). He also reminds us of Cohen’s “satiric purpose,” which Cohen himself claimed was to use his own mock anti-Semitism to reveal the undercurrent of prejudice—or perhaps just an “acceptance” (Strauss) of prejudice—in America. At what point, if at all, does Cohen’s satire cross the line separating simple satire and actual prejudice? Cohen would likely claim that it never does, and that his responsibility to the purpose of his film overrides his ethical responsibility to the audience, who may incorrectly interpret his satire. This disagreement attests to the confusing nature of the ethical expectations of documentary film—expectations that are often open to interpretation.

Two people can scrutinize the same standard and interpret it in completely opposite ways, as Cohen and his critics evidently did.

Most of the individuals filmed in *Borat* would certainly take an opposing stance to that of Cohen regarding the film's ethicality. Several of them sued Cohen for his deception and the often humiliating circumstances in which they appeared onscreen. Two frat brothers, who made numerous racist and misogynistic remarks during their interactions with Borat, including the declaration that they wish America still practiced slavery, sued Cohen for causing them "mental anguish" and a "loss of reputation" (Barkham). Another participant reportedly lost his job for planning a news segment centered on Borat, during which Borat continually interrupted the reporter. In light of this evidence, many believe that the subjects were "victimized more for sadistic laughter than sociological insight" (Lewis 82). In some cases, the scenes in the film support this statement—running naked through a hotel hardly seems to uncover any hidden prejudice or comment on the state of society. On the other hand, Cohen's statement that Borat's prejudices allow others to expose their own suggests that ruining a few lives is excusable when promoting a societal awareness of these prejudices. It can be also be argued that some individuals in the film, such as the frat brothers, deserve the repercussions of their perverse and archaic beliefs, even if these beliefs were exposed only through Borat's instigations. The humor coach that Borat fooled in the documentary, whom Borat subjected to "jokes" about having sex with his mother-in-law, even conceded his belief in Cohen's "comedic genius" (Barkham). Case in point: the perspectives vary greatly regarding whether or not the victimization of several people featured in *Borat* is justified, leading to even more ambiguity in the overall ethical standpoint of his film.

Since Pryluck first began to promote ethical filmmaking, many others have contributed their ideas to the subject. As Sanders acknowledges, however, "the suggestion to make rules and standards explicit has seen little to no serious follow-up in the documentary field" (542). This inexplicit way of judging the morals of a film and its maker, based on mere suggestions and widely-held expectations, comprises the debate surrounding documentary ethics, upon which few scholars can agree. Was Cohen right or wrong in making *Borat*, and how does one reconcile the differing opinions into one simple verdict? In the end, there exists no definitive or

universal way to answer this question—and as Sanders contends, solidifying our current expectations into definite rules would be not only “undesirable,” but also “unrealistic” (542).

The current ethical expectations of documentaries are inefficient and inconsistent. Individual suggestions provided by Pryluck, Ruby, and others certainly have merit, but when they are all simultaneously considered the standard for documentaries, conflicting ideas arise. Many scholars have proposed solutions to these disagreements. Pryluck suggested collaboration between the filmmaker and the filmed, in which the “filmmakers share control over the film with participants” (Sanders 539), allowing them a role in editing the final product. “Reflexivity,” in which the filmmaker records and makes public the process involved in making their documentaries—where their “actions...are open to scrutiny” (Sanders 540)—is another idea several people, including Jay Ruby, have proposed. Even with these solutions, there is reason to believe that they would result in much of the same confusion as the current standards do—there will always be disagreement and conflicting interpretations of ethical boundaries. Different backgrounds, different cultures and different belief systems guarantee it. In reality, a perfectly ethical documentary is simply unfeasible.

Rather than set a rigid standard to rid ourselves of these ambiguities, we should do the opposite and loosen the restrictive expectations placed on documentary filmmakers and their films. The current suggested guidelines already contain too many disagreements—simply making the guidelines explicit would do little to dispel differing opinions; in fact, these differing opinions would render it difficult to make the guidelines explicit in the first place. Rather, we should consider filmmakers artists and the films their art. According to Ruby, a time in which “an artist could take photographs of strangers...and justify the action as the inherent right of the artist is...ending” (309). Yet, with an application of stricter rules, filmmakers would lose their freedom to apply their artistic vision to their art—documentaries such as *Borat* would face much difficulty in the course of their creation. Documentaries as a means of objectively conveying information, unable to do much more in the face of demanding ethical guidelines, would replace documentaries as a creative concept. The art of documentaries would be reduced to a list of do and do-nots, and the field as a whole would lose much of its artistic appeal. But, “where does one

draw the line” between the ethical needs of their subjects and “the aesthetic needs of the artist?” (Ruby 313).

Though the ethical guidelines of documentaries should be relaxed to allow filmmakers more artistic freedom, it is undeniable that such freedom necessitates a respect of basic human rights; a consideration of the fundamental concepts of morality. A line must be drawn somewhere. In truth, where this line is drawn depends on the film. Applying the same guidelines to very different films would diminish the diversity of documentaries—while *Borat* owes its existence to a defiance of suggested documentary guidelines, another documentary may rely on them. Within moral reason, the filmmaker has the right to decide where their own artistic needs lie in relation to the needs of the subjects. Pryluck, conversely, suggests a collaborative approach, in which the subjects are involved in the filming process—Sanders counters with the claim that “a collaborative approach...endanger[s] the freedom of expression as well as artistic freedom of filmmakers” (541). Sanders acknowledges that some filmmakers may prefer to utilize this approach, but that “it is difficult to see how this could serve as a working code for all documentary filmmakers” (541), since many would consider such an approach a hindrance to their own creative vision. One could argue that the art of documentary could not exist if not for the willing participation of its subjects—yet the person behind the camera ultimately decides the purpose of their film. Thus, a filmmaker should strive for a suitable compromise, rather than the unachievable perfect balance, between the rights of his or her subjects and the right to “stay true to [his or her] personal visions of the world—to make artistically competent statements” (Ruby 313).

While compromise presents a reasonable solution to the conflicting interests that arise during documentary filmmaking, Sanders recommends further action, claiming that we should “collect empirical [experiential] data about filmmakers’ experiences and their opinions” (548), rather than base ethical standards on theoretical presumptions. Sander’s suggestion presents the plausible beginnings of a long-term solution, since empirical research could reveal, in time, an efficient and widely agreed-upon standard for documentary ethics. Scholars such as Calvin Pryluck have certainly attempted to begin this long process towards a universal standard, but as it stands, the field of documentary is too varied and ever-changing to apply

to it a set of stiff regulations. Keeping in mind that ethical guidelines are often based upon already existing moral limitations—a fundamental sense of what is right and wrong—documentaries should be considered more as a filmmaker’s creative outlet than as his or her ethical obligation to one’s audience and subjects.

Suggestions for ethical guidelines of documentaries have been debated for years, but have yet to be made into exact standards, leading to confusion regarding what a documentarian should and should not do in the process of filming. This ambiguity results from the many conflicting viewpoints held by the scholars of documentary filmmaking, who have suggested several solutions, none of which have been officially implemented in the field. Sacha Baron Cohen, in his film *Borat*, suggests with his blatant disregard of the expectations of documentary films that such expectations are too restrictive, even without being explicit, standardized rules. If Cohen had attempted to fulfill these expectations in his creation of *Borat*, the documentary would undeniably cease to exist as it does now. In the end, documentarians can do everything in their power to create a thoroughly ethical film and still encounter enmity—such an ideal is simply unachievable. Rather than strive for an ideal that will forever be just beyond our grasp, we should accept documentary filmmakers as artists and their films as art, allowing them the creative freedom that such titles imply.

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## From the Instructor

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Our final paper for WR 150: “Modern and Contemporary American Poetry” builds upon the analytical, argumentative, and research skills introduced in the first two papers. In order to enlarge the scope and complexity of their arguments, students are asked to conduct a more substantial exploration of multiple poems or a longer poem by any poet of their choosing. Similar to Papers 1 and 2, students must find their motivation for writing in the arguments of others; however, this time students are not provided any exhibit or argument sources for their consideration. Paper 3 required students to locate and engage with all source material independently. Beyond this, the paper has to be 2000-3000 words in length and use at least five sources (two of which had to be argument sources).

What is most remarkable about Carly Sitrin’s “Making Sense: Decoding Gertrude Stein” is that Gertrude Stein is routinely left off the syllabus because of her incredible difficulty, not only for a “general education” audience, but also for the most ardent lovers and scholars of modern poetry. In addition, Carly’s essay demonstrates exemplary *command* over source material (clear and nuanced comprehension) and *control* (where and when to deploy sources in service of audience and argument), and, in particular, strong use of theory sources, which in our course are perhaps the most challenging sources to understand and utilize.

— Jason Tandon

WR 150: Modern and Contemporary American Poetry

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## From the Writer

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“Making Sense: Decoding Gertrude Stein” was a labor of love. My prewriting process was erratic, to say the least, and I frequently found myself drowning in piles of shorthand, flowcharts, pizza boxes, and highlighted books trying desperately to piece together some semblance of an argument. What ultimately saved me, however, was my genuine interest and immersion in the topic. I read Stein on the train to work, on my walk to class, and before I went to bed at night. Obsessive as it may seem, this act of incorporating my topic into my everyday life was much more beneficial for me than any formal prewriting exercise.

My biggest struggle in dealing with a paper of this magnitude was definitely organization. With the guidance of my professor and peer reviewers, I was able to fit my concepts together in a coherent matter with the use of section headings. This format allowed me to explore topics that I felt were crucial to my argument without worrying about connecting them together with the traditional approach of transitional sentences.

— Carly Sitrin

## MAKING SENSE: DECODING GERTRUDE STEIN

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On Saturday evenings in number 27 rue de Fleurus on the Left Bank of Paris, Gertrude Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas played host to a gathering of noteworthy artists and writers. It was here in the early decades of the century that people flocked to view the women's unrivaled display of modern art and share in their conversations as the expatriates waxed poetic about art, science, and philosophy. By surrounding herself with such avant-garde culture and innovative perspectives, Stein created a laboratory of conceptual and intellectual thought which heavily influenced her own writing. Although her opinions were coveted by the great thinkers of her time, Stein's abstract poetic style has had a polarizing effect on those who encounter her work. In his critique entitled "Art by Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein," B. L. Reid finds most of Stein's writing to be "unreadable" and of no intellectual value (93). He claims that her poetry is "not for the normal mind" and asserts that it is not worth the time it takes to read it (93). Similarly, Michael Gold in his article "Gertrude Stein: A Literary Idiot" echoes Reid's claims, and argues that "her works read like the literature of the students of padded cells in Matteawan" further stressing the insanity of Stein's prose.

Reid's and Gold's analyses, however, are far too reductive. I agree that at first glance, and without any background knowledge, Stein's poetry is challenging and seemingly senseless; however, I argue that Stein's writing demands context to be fully appreciated. Since she was a highly educated woman who spent her days with some of the greatest artistic minds of the century, it is not surprising that her technique requires that the reader have a foundation of artistic and scientific comprehension. To

dismiss her work as unintelligible is to refuse to put in the effort to understand it. Her poems and novels demonstrate that her educational background studying psychology under William James, her time spent around artists such as Pablo Picasso, and her years studying the language centers of the brain all played a significant role in how she constructed her writing.

## Jamesian Psychology

As a student at Radcliffe College, Gertrude Stein studied under the influential psychologist William James and, in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, stated:

The important person in Gertrude Stein's Radcliffe life was William James. She enjoyed her life and herself. She was secretary of the Philosophical club and amused herself with all sorts of people. She liked making sport of question asking and she liked equally answering them. She liked it all. But the really lasting impression of her Radcliffe life came through William James. (73)

Her years spent at Radcliffe saw Stein working closely with James, taking part in several experiments, and publishing her own articles in scientific publications. These experiments focused on “normal and induced motor automatism,” or actions located on the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness (Weinstein 16). The experiments made use of automatic reading and writing phenomena for the most part, but it was James' *Psychology* (1892) that contained a chapter that would most heavily influence Stein's later poetic career. This chapter entitled “The Stream of Consciousness” combined his fascination with the psychology of consciousness with the psychology of language and use of words. The questions that plagued James—What is consciousness? How does consciousness relate to the whole personality? Is consciousness continuous or discontinuous?—are directly explored in the works of Gertrude Stein.

The concept of stream of consciousness starts with the idea that “consciousness of some kind goes on. ‘States of mind’ succeed each other.” He argues that as “ideas recur, although the ideas may be the same, we see them in different relationships” (Miller 13). More simply stated, the repetition of words and concepts can change their implications, just as the physi-

cal act of repeating a word aloud can alter its meaning. In Gertrude Stein's writing, she utilizes this strategy of repetition to inject a deeper and more expansive significance to her words. For example, her poem "Sacred Emily" recounts in minute detail the everyday actions of a woman in her home. The piece consists of exactly 367 staccato lines repeating phrases such as "push sea" eight times in one line (33). While this statement may at first seem to be nonsense, according to Jamesian psychology, the more often it appears, the more the meaning expands. In this way, the phrase "push sea" transforms from the literal vision of a breaking wave to the kneading motion of the poem's subject as she prepares dinner and, later, the motion of her knitting needles.

Following the Jamesian theory of transformational meaning, the famous line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" appears for the first time in "Sacred Emily" and is later found in several of her other works as well. This line can be interpreted as epitomizing the infinite forms of a word. The capitalization of the first "Rose" is in reference to a name while the following three refer to the past tense of the verb "to rise," the color rose, and the flower (Ramazani 34). As a result, the constant repetition of the word causes it to alter its significance in the mind of the reader, thus imbuing what appears to be nonsense with more symbolic meaning.

The notion of repetition is further expanded upon in Stein's use of Jamesian characterology. Along with his concept of "stream of consciousness," James pioneered the assumption of a pluralistic universe, saying the "world is teeming with possibilities that can be actualized by man," basically signifying that the personality is the product of what a person most emphasizes in his field of consciousness (Weinstein 17). He purports that habit plays a large role in defining a person. When utilized as a lens to analyze Gertrude Stein's poetry, the seemingly tedious repeating phrases become the defining forces in a character's existence. The most glaring example of this use of habit to define a person comes in Stein's piece *Melanctha*, a portion of her larger work *Three Lives*. Taken at face value, not much is actually accomplished throughout the plot. Melanctha, an African American servant girl, tends to her ill mother, pursues three men, and falls in love with one of them. She then falls out of love, contracts tuberculosis, and dies. The story itself is simple; however, the art lies in Stein's unique form of characterization. Rather than revealing the character's personalities

in their actions, Stein chooses to place the focus on the characters' stream of consciousness and an omniscient narrator to divulge their traits rather than a sudden epiphany or willful action.

Paramount in Stein's longer writing is her belief in the stability of a character. She accepts the Jamesian notion of characterology and expands upon it by asserting her conviction that, once a character is set in his archetype, the possibility of any major changes is unlikely. This again is evidenced by her use of repetition and habit in "Sacred Emily" and *Melanctha*. "Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive," Stein writes continually throughout the piece (*Three Lives*). Despite the environment, Melanctha is always described exactly the same way. While this constant affirmation may at first appear to be monotonous nonsense, Stein utilizes this structure to convey her beliefs about humanity. Namely, because a person is permanently stuck in their character type, defining him or her consists of a constant cycle of assertion and realization of the same simple thing. The character's thoughts may drift from subject to subject, but their core personality is always constant. Melanctha may fall in and out of love, she may live or die, but she will always be "graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive" (*Three Lives*).

More specifically, Stein uses her verb tenses and word choice in *Melanctha* to dictate the characters' personalities. Melanctha's lover, Jeff, believes in "loving" and "being good to everybody" and "trying to understand" (*Three Lives*). His consciousness is filled with participles, qualifying adjectives and clauses as he struggles to achieve his emotions, rather than simply feeling them. In contrast, Melanctha says, "I certainly do understand," thus asserting her definitive and logical nature through her verbs rather than through her actions (*Three Lives*). As a result of the importance placed on word choice, the events of the story can come in any sequence. Melanctha is the same person throughout the story, unchanged by her environment, which Stein proves by removing the logical progression of time.

A final tenet of Jamesian psychology used to portray characters in Stein's writing is his notion of a "continuous present" (Miller 19). At its core, "continuous present" is the visualization of time as fluid and all encompassing. Rather than a traditional linear structure of "first, next, then, last," James promotes the concept of every event occurring simulta-

neously in the mind. Stein utilizes this ideology in *Melanctha* by creating discontinuities in narrative time. The piece begins:

Rose Johnson made it very hard to bring her baby to its birth. Melanctha Herbert who was Rose Johnson's friend, did everything any woman could . . . the child though it was healthy after it was born, did not live long. (1-3)

Nearly a hundred pages later, this information is relayed again almost identically. Although *Melanctha* and Rose's friendship does not flourish until late in *Melanctha's* life, the piece opens with their relationship and the eventual death of Rose's child. This purposeful removal of chronological continuity, while seemingly nonsensical, is integral to Stein's style. By presenting the reader with all of the important character information at once, the reader is forced to consider all of the facts equally. This closely follows James' concept that what is emphasized in the consciousness, regardless of time or event, is the best measure of characterization. In this way through his notions of "stream of consciousness," "characterology," and "continuous present," Jamesian psychology serves as a key to decode Stein's seemingly erratic writing style.

## Cubism

Of secondary importance in Gertrude Stein's life and poetic style was the cubist work of artists such as Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris. The artists were close friends with Stein and her partner Alice Toklas and frequently displayed their work in the couple's apartment. As W.G. Rogers asserted in his book *When This You See Remember Me: Gertrude Stein in Person*, "*Tender Buttons* is to writing...exactly what cubism is to art," stressing the connection that the artists forged. A basic description of cubism is the destruction, dissection, and reassembling of an object with the intention of capturing its essence. The idea falls in line with Stein's belief of the "continuous present." As Picasso wrote in his 1923 *Statement to Marius De Zayas*, "to me there is no past or future in art. If a work cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all," thus stressing his belief in the timelessness of any artistic style ("Picasso Speaks"). At its core, cubism operates on the notion that an object is not the sum of its parts, but rather every atom of an object contains within it the essence of the whole, and

therefore can be rearranged at will while still maintaining the overall sense of the thing.

This concept of the strategic reassembling an object is explored at length in Stein's book of poetry *Tender Buttons*. Take, for example, Stein's description of "A Handkerchief": "A winning of all the blessings, a sample not a sample because there is no worry" (24). What the piece lacks is cohesion. The words themselves are not challenging, just as a piece of cubist art is nothing more than a simple color or shape; the art comes from the organization as a whole. Stein's work is not meant to be analyzed word by word, connecting the concepts of "blessings" to the common phrase "bless you" following a sneeze. Rather, she intends her poetry to be digested all at once, in the "continuous present" with every word carrying the same weight because every word contains within it the essence of the whole.

Another crucial principle of cubism is the concept that the subject is "veiled by the medium of description" (Lewis). For Picasso, the "veils" were the planes into which the painter broke up the canvas, while Stein's "veils," according to Marjorie Perloff in her book *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, are the abstract patterns of her words. Perloff asserts that Stein's objects "not only are fragmented and decomposed as they are in cubist still-life; they also serve as false leads forcing the reader to consider the very nature of naming." In this way, Stein's manipulation of her syntax, while seemingly random and senseless, is actually a calculated strategy enacted to shake up the reader's preconceived notions of the subject. Eyeglasses become "A color in shaving, a saloon is well placed in the centre of an alley," rather than two clear glass lenses in metal frames (*Tender Buttons* 21). This conscious action of portraying glasses without the expected combination of words forces the reader to see the subject in a new light. The initial confusion caused by the apparent lack of cohesion acts as a fog or veil through which the reader must actively try to see through. Stein is attempting to make her audience sit up and pay attention, to read critically and engage their minds just as Picasso wanted to engage his viewers in his art.

## Linguistic Relativity

A final influence that gives context to Gertrude Stein's writing is the psychological theory of Linguistic Relativity pioneered by Benjamin



Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir, sometimes referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Throughout her studies at Johns Hopkins medical school and her interactions with William James, Stein focused much of her education on uncovering the mysteries of the brain, with a specific concentration on the neural connections between consciousness and language (Weinstein 52). Among the theories gaining popularity during her time in school was the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which, summarized, states that language influences thought. In this way, people speaking different languages would therefore have different perceptions of the world around them. With this in mind, what Stein seeks to accomplish in her writing is a completely novel view of reality. She intends to explore the limits of language in the hope that it will lead to an entirely new understanding of the world in which we live.

Among Whorf and Sapir's more controversial assertions is the notion that, if a word for an object does not exist in a given language, then the individuals who speak that language must not think about that object. This concept is not proven or refuted by Stein's writing, but rather explored. In her poetry in *Tender Buttons*, Stein purposefully avoids using common nouns when defining her objects and instead chooses to talk around the subject while still alluding to its existence. For example, in her poem "A Red Stamp," the omission of words is just as important as the words she chooses to include. Consider a stamp. The words most commonly associated with it would likely include envelope, letter, send, mail, corner, etc. Stein, however, seems to be playing a form of the game Taboo in which she avoids these words of association at all costs. In doing so, she asserts that the sense of an object can be gleaned without typical or expected explanation. And, while Whorf and Sapir would argue that a culture with no word for telephone must not think about telephones, Stein would answer by stating that it is possible to indicate an object without stating it outright.

This strategy of talking around a subject to capture its essence adds to her desire to depict an object in its entirety. As expressed by her cubist influences, Stein's writing revolves around the concept of the subject as a whole, completed, entity. Her pieces in *Tender Buttons* represent the reality of a specific item as reflected by her consciousness. This concept is most thoroughly explored in her poem "A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass."

Structured as a definition, she first gives the object (a Carafe) followed by its description. However, her description is not the general depiction commonly found in a dictionary. The key to Stein's poetry is understanding that she is not defining a carafe. She is defining *her* carafe. The glass that she sees at a certain time, in a certain light, through her eyes, is different from any old glass on a table. With this in mind, the description becomes purely experiential and personal. Phrases such as "an arrangement in a system to pointing" may mean nothing to a reader sitting in a library because they were crafted to capture a certain subject in its full essence at one moment in time (*Tender Buttons* 9). Her poetry therefore is not meant to be understood and accessible to all, but rather a way of transmitting across time and space the experience of life itself.

With the consideration that Stein's poetry is meant to capture an experience, what follows is the notion that traditional grammar rules do not and should not apply. Critics of Stein will point to her omission of traditional punctuation and abundant usage of verbs as crass or meaningless; however, this could not be further from the truth. Her refusal to abide by the laws of coherent language frees her to create new meaning with her poetry and stand as a maverick forming new methods of thought. Just as notes can be combined to form melodies and symphonies, words too can create music. However, the desire to form a "logical" sentence restricts the writer to using melodies that have already been written. When these restrictions are removed, the writer is free to conduct symphonies that have never before been heard. The cadence of her poem "Vegetable" is a perfect example. She writes, "it was a cress a crescent a cross and an unequal scream," which, at first glance is complete nonsense (*Tender Buttons* 53). But, read aloud, read as music, the sentence is melodic and unfamiliar. It is a combination of simple words that has never before been written simply because of the fear inherent in not being understood. Therefore, Gertrude Stein uses her language to shatter the preconceived notions of reality and create a new perception of the world through her word choices.

By taking into consideration the influences of psychology and art on Gertrude Stein's poetry, her words are transformed from puzzling gibberish to works of deep intellectual merit. In many ways, however, Stein's stream of consciousness writing can even be taken as a form of Taoist meditation, as her exploration of the inner consciousness leads to

her perceptual formation of her own personality. Perhaps Stein's writing cannot possibly be understood by anyone other than herself. Therefore, the harder we struggle to understand her words, the more meaning we inject in our desperate attempts to stave off the emptiness that encroaches in the absence of complete understanding. Like Jeff Cambell in "Melanctha," we are "trying to understand" and are constantly fighting our natural state of emptiness, when maybe what we should be doing is turning inward to embrace our inner chasms as Stein did with her poetry. After all, it was Robert Frost who said,

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human race it.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places. (13–16)

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## From the Instructor

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Nicholas wrote this paper for my WR 150 course that surveys debates surrounding the free market. The second major paper in the course challenges students to contend with two uncompromising visions of the market's virtues and evils: Karl Marx's narrative of exploitation and estranged labor in *The Communist Manifesto* vs. John Galt's forceful speech at the end of *Atlas Shrugged*, through which Ayn Rand asserts that competition alone can engender individual autonomy and national prosperity. As a writer, the young Marx exemplifies many of the lessons that I teach my students. He provides an insightful and consistent framework for analysis—class relations—but does so through an elegant story with clear protagonists, antagonists, and a compelling narrative of historical struggle. Rand consciously inverts aspects of Marx's narrative, contrasting “men of ability,” personified by Galt himself, with the weaker strata of society who seek shelter from the vicissitudes of struggle.

Nicholas demonstrates in this paper his capacity to grasp the core points of contention between Rand and Marx, but also to elucidate the relevance of their grand visions for contemporary political debates in clear, insightful, and often clever prose. Nicholas frequently settled on a theme and argument from the first draft of his papers, and spent subsequent drafts developing those ideas further. He made good use of scholarly sources to substantiate his argument in this paper, especially when demonstrating that Rand, far from being a marginal twentieth-century thinker, has attained a mythical status for the contemporary American Right that is nearly on a par with the cult of Marxism in the scholarly and political movements of the past century. Nicholas makes this complex subject very approachable by writing in simple prose and consistently staying on point throughout the paper.

— David Levy

WR 150: The Free Market: Liberating or Exploitative?

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## From the Writer

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My essay, “That Ayn’t Rand: The Sensationalization of Objectivist Theory,” discusses the role of objectivism in contemporary American politics. I discuss the ideological debate between Karl Marx and Ayn Rand in the context of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. By comparing Ayn Rand’s own writing with that of one of her friends and contemporary advocates, Harry Binswanger, I attempt to illuminate the destructive simplification that modern objectivists have adopted in an attempt to gain recognition. Objectivism has struggled since its formation to find an audience among intellectuals and academics, who have largely dismissed the theory. As a result, Rand’s theories have been condensed further and further over the years to maximize impact and audience. In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate how this reduction of Rand’s theories actually hurts the objectivist cause rather than helping it. I hold that this oversimplification is partially to blame for the Occupy Wall Street movement’s distrust of capitalism as a system. I find that it is obvious why Occupy protestors loathe large manipulative corporations and the mega-rich, but less so why that distrust would extend to capitalism, a theoretical system of organization never fully implemented anywhere.

— Nicholas Supple

## THAT AYN'T RAND: THE SENSATIONALIZATION OF OBJECTIVIST THEORY<sup>1</sup>

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Fifty-seven years after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* and thirty-two years after Ayn Rand's death, Rand's theories receive as much popular mention as they ever have. The conservative Tea Party movement has adopted Rand's conception of a minarchist government as their core platform. Meanwhile, Karl Marx, though more famous, has all but disappeared from the contemporary American political debate and receives mention only in cheap political attacks. Cold war tension pitted US capitalism against Russian communism, labeling any and all of Marx's theories and writings as inherently anti-American, totally removing them from public debate. And yet, in spite of this, Marx's theories and visions still reverberate within the political left who have been unable to ignore the systemic inequalities in the American economy. The stigmatism placed on Marx has robbed the political left of an ideological platform and left them only with a series of empirical observations and tendencies in thought. This blacklisting of Marx and simultaneous worship of Rand has left us with a debate between ideological reasoning on the right and empirical observations on the left. This has removed the possibility of logical progression, and left only the possibility of a victory in political popularity. This breakdown in logical discussion has been a key contributing factor in the crippling stalemate of contemporary American politics.

The focal point in the modern debate between these two great thinkers is the extent to which the federal government should regulate and tax private industry and the so-called job creators who manage it. The Occupy Wall Street movement galvanized the debate into a struggle

between the 99% and the 1%, a divide not between classic upper and lower classes, but between those making above \$380,000 a year and those making any less (Dewan et al.). Given that the median salaries of stereotypical upperclass professions like doctors and lawyers are \$187,200 and \$113,530 respectively, it's clear that the \$380,000 threshold is far beyond any classic conception of upper class. Far from your typical successful suburbanite, the 1% is a far more exotic mix of entrepreneurs, CEOs, trust-funders, and finance specialist.

This classification of haves and have-nots is a far cry from the proletariat and bourgeoisie divide Marx imaged over 150 years ago. Likewise, the rise of the global economy has stratified political classes in a way Rand could not have foreseen. With this shift in class identity and equally important shift in world economies, we can no longer rely on the pictures of society Marx and Rand painted, but rather must focus on the principles they established in response.

At the heart of this socioeconomic debate is the question of who creates value: is value primarily created by man-hours of labor or rather by the ingenuity of entrepreneurs in organizing the factors of production? In his time, Marx claimed that the capitalist owner exploits the labor of the proletariat worker, excising part of the value their work creates. Rand, in response, claimed that it is not the capitalists who exploit the laborers, but just the opposite: that the laborers live off of the ideas and mental efforts of the freethinking entrepreneurs.

Contemporary political commentators like Harry Binswanger have closely aligned Rand and ethical egoism with the conservative, pro-1% camp, but in doing so have simplified and reduced Rand's theories into a "common conception of selfishness" (Campos 81). In his *Forbes* OP/ED "Give Back? Yes, It's Time For The 99% To Give Back To The 1%," Binswanger makes the claim that "it is 'the community' that should give back to the wealth-creators." Binswanger—a former philosophy professor, published author, Board Member of the Ayn Rand Institute, and personal friend to Rand during her later years—is as well versed in Objectivism as any other living academic, and even he cheapens Rand's theories in popular media to attract a broad audience. In the piece, Binswanger bases his defense of the 1% on Rand's "pyramid of ability," which states,



the material value of your work is determined not only by your effort, but by the effort of the best productive minds who exist in the world around you. When you work in a modern factory, you are paid, not only for your labor, but for all the productive genius which has made that factory possible. (Rand 1064)

That is, the theory goes, industrialists aren't in debt to the factory workers who put their plan into action; rather, it is the factory workers who owe the industrialists for being given the plan of action. Where Binswanger parts from Rand is his hyper focus on the 'high-earners,' who in reality only represent a fraction of Rand's 'men of ability.' He equates ability with wealth, undermining Rand's chief intention to praise freethinking and ingenuity. Neither he nor Rand properly draw such a connection, and yet it has become a landmark assumption of the modern objectivist argument. In fact, most of the villains in Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, the book Binswanger quotes at length, are themselves rich and powerful. The most notable of these is the character James Taggart, a rich industrialist Rand villainizes for his inability to think critically and independently from popular opinion and government edict (Thomas).

For all of Rand's focus on ability, ingenuity, and invention, Binswanger barely makes mention of it. Instead, he presupposes that profit is equal to value created and assumes all those who make a profit must themselves create value. Of course, Binswanger's writing is intentionally sensationalized to bait a response from the left-wing thinkers of the Occupy movements, but—far from harmless—this type of sensational simplification of Rand in right-wing rhetoric has made objectivism, and—by association—laissez-faire capitalism, the object of unapproachable disgust to many in the conversation. No matter how he frames it, Binswanger removes the possibility of logical argumentation when he makes statements like this:

Anyone who earns a million dollars or more should be exempt from all income taxes. Yes, it's too little. And the real issue is not financial, but moral. So to augment the tax-exemption, in an annual public ceremony, the year's top earner should be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. (Binswanger)

By pretending, even momentarily, that our current society is one of "voluntary trade, without force or fraud" (Binswanger), he alienates all those who

are not either already familiar with the theory, or already very rich. Earlier in the piece, Binswanger attempts to qualify and frame this statement by condemning the likes of Bernie Madoff, but he fails to recognize that, had he written this piece just a few years earlier, he would have been advocating awarding Madoff with the Congressional Medal of Honor. Binswanger opposes the profit of men like Madoff, but fails to build this opposition into his principled statements of theory.

Binswanger poses these provocative statements to elicit a response from the left-wing Occupy sympathizers, but the absence of a core left-wing ideology leaves them without a theoretical framework with which to evaluate his claims. This forces a mere empirical evaluation of his claims at face value which, given their sensational nature, leaves the left with no choice but to view Rand's work as "the philosophy of the psychopath, a misanthropic fantasy of cruelty, revenge and greed" (Monbiot). Had Marx been allowed in on the discussion, it could become a debate over theories of value or ethical egoism itself. The left would be challenging claims like "since profit is the market value of the product minus the market value of factors used, profit represents the value created" (Binswanger). In fact, Marx attacked this very idea in his own work, supporting instead a labor theory of value, according to which "the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labor time contained in it" (Freedman 33). This means that the value created in the production of a good is a function only of the labor input. Working under this theory, Marx concluded that the profits of capitalists, who themselves put a very small amount of labor into each good produced, must represent a seized portion of the value created by the laborer. This theory would hold that all profits are extracted from the worker by the industrialist and therefore that the capitalist himself is nothing more than a leech on the production process. This is the core of Marx's exploitation theory of capitalism.

The glaring flaw in the labor theory of value is its inability to account for the effects of demand on price. The theory runs into further trouble in explaining the effects, on cost, of land and capital. In place of an objective theory like this, contemporary economics prefers a subjective theory of price as the interaction between the demand of consumers and the willingness to sell, or supply, of producers. Although some have attempted to adapt the labor theory to account for land and capital, none

have succeeded in subjectively spinning the theory to accommodate modern observations (Murphy 18). In the end, the labor theory of value has disappeared from the conversation due to its inability to account for newfound empirical economic observations.

Likewise, as we shall see, it is time for the objectivists' theory to cede to new economic insights. As Binswanger tells us, the objectivist theory of value is that "since profit is the market value of the product minus the market value of factors used, profit represents the value created." While intuitively appealing, this theory ignores the economic realities of our mixed global economy. Primarily, this theory would propose that monopoly profits (known as rents) —which are obtained by scaling back production so as to restrict supply and raise price—are the result of a value creation process. Monopoly rents are obtained by producing less of a valuable good, not by creating more value. While monopoly rents might have been a minor feature of the competitive post war 1950's economy Rand observed, monopoly rents are increasingly becoming the rule, rather than the exception, in today's global economy (Krugman). This theory likewise has trouble holding water in light of the growing importance of financial speculation in place of classic investment. Rand applauded investors who saved "money to risk on the untried and new" (1064), but as investment declines in our economy we see an equally important rise in speculation. Modern speculation like those in the derivatives, futures, and stock markets are a far cry from the business investments Rand observed. The investment of Rand's day was primarily the financing of new and expanding businesses, and, perhaps more importantly, they were investments in the new ideas those businesses represented, like Hank Rearden's investment in a new—untried—form of steel in *Atlas Shrugged*. The speculation that has taken over modern financial markets is not a gamble on an idea; rather, it's a gamble primarily on the actions of other players in the market. As Andre Santos Campos tells us,

speculation involves trading abstract values with the expectation of acquiring higher abstract values (e.g. trading derivatives and short-selling are speculative activities by definition), whereas investment involves fueling the productive activities of different assets. (94)

While this new kind of investment adds to the liquidity of classic business

investment, it simultaneously removes capital from that market, placing it instead into a secondary, purely speculative, market. Profits of financial companies operating in these speculative markets then do not represent the adding of value to the economy, as they do not actually contribute to the production of any good or service; rather, they represent a successful anticipation of the future value other firms would place on a given asset.

The reality is that Binswanger and the modern objectivists are not ignorant of these facts; instead, they pose their idyllic theory of profit simply to support the very notion that profit can be a moral attainment of wealth. The problem is that the objectivists seem to have largely forgotten the hypothetical nature of this proposition and have instead begun to take it as indisputable fact.

Perhaps inspired by Rand's solution in Galt's gulch, the objectivists seem to refuse to productively discuss their theories, preferring instead to declare ad nauseam the conclusions they've reached, as though they're simply waiting for everyone to realize they are right. In the course of doing so, their rhetoric has increasingly tended toward sensational and almost absurd claims, leaving left-wing empiricist no choice but to reject the theory as a whole after the claims fail to stand up to observation. To restart the engine of progress, we need an honest engagement, on both sides, with the origins of their core theories and claims, not to find a middle ground between Rand and Marx, but a road forward. Neither Rand nor Marx could have foreseen the shape and function of modern economies, and it's time we stop pretending they could have. In that vein, Binswanger and the right wing would do well to remember that the Occupy movements aren't inherently anti-capitalist; rather, they represent frustration with the systemic inequalities and injustices found in our global mixed economy. Rather than defending the notion of profit, the objectivists should be attacking the fraud and corruption that distort the very markets they are defending.

## NOTES

1. Part of this title is borrowed from David MacGregor's philosophical analysis "It Ayn't Rand."

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