

nomad²⁰¹⁰

THE TRASH EDITION

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University of Oregon

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

I realized halfway through the 2009/2010 *NOMAD* Mentorship Program (the collaborative process between undergraduates, graduates and faculty, the results of which you now hold in your hands) that the essays would be published and forever associated with the TRASH Edition. By my logic, the students and mentors deserved better than to have their work associated with detritus, the leftovers, the putrescence we expel in order to keep our worlds clean and orderly. However, having pored over these eight bravely curious essays, I think differently. What seems to emerge is an idea of “trash” which, rather than filthy leavings, suggests a crucial perspective. As “polite” society wallows in its cleanliness, thus forming a self-congratulatory echo-chamber, these essays insist on looking, not from the inside out, but from the expelled margins inward. Apparently, the view from history’s trash heaps and landfills is profoundly edifying. Most of these essays, then, address efforts to reclaim and/or celebrate the perspectives of those who have historically been trashed, be it on the basis of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, sanity, or even species. Far from being without value, such “trash,” just like these essays and the collaborative spirit from which they derive, is priceless. Thanks to all who were part of the process. That *NOMAD* continues to grow in quality, prominence, stature, and alliances is a true reflection of the committed creativity of those who contribute to it annually.

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RACHEL M. RASMUSSEN

Rachel Rasmussen is a senior philosophy major, comparative literature and creative writing minor. Her writing engages questions of identity and explores all aspects of her heritage.

Nomad Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Scholarship: **Winner**

Mentor: Prof. LeahMiddlebrook

"OUR STORY, AS I KNOW IT"

Too many histories of North American Native peoples are decomposing in the landfill of time.

As a Native American, my whole life has been littered with an inheritance of trash. Both of my ancestral tribes, the Tolowa and the Tututni, were marched on a Trail of Tears up 234 miles of the Oregon coastline. Some made it to the end of the journey in Siletz, Oregon. There,

they were heaped together with other tribes from all over Oregon, California, and Washington on a reservation. Others from my tribes were marched right off of a cliff during the journey. Even though this is the history that took place right on modern America's doorsteps, most of us are unaware of the events this country has experienced. Those who do know history are typically the ancestors of tragedy, people who do not have the luxury of forgetting even as they continue to move forward. It was not merely the bodies of the natives that were tossed into the landfill, but all recognition in mainstream America's consciousness of their way of life. This is what I deal with on some level all of the time.

Today, I am driving with my mother to pick up my younger sister from her last day at the NAYA school. The facility opened in 1974 as an extension of the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) and was at the time solely volunteer-based. In 1994 the school became a 501(c)(3) organization¹ serving "self-identified Native American youth and their families throughout the Portland Metropolitan area." While we enrolled my sister in the school at the start of the year with high hopes for what being surrounded by other native students and faculty could do for her,

¹ The exempt purposes set forth in section 501(c)(3) are charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering national or international amateur sports competition, and preventing cruelty to children or animals. The term charitable is used in its generally accepted legal sense and includes relief of the poor, the distressed, or the underprivileged; advancement of religion; advancement of education or science; erecting or maintaining public buildings, monuments, or works; lessening the burdens of government; lessening neighborhood tensions; eliminating prejudice and discrimination; defending human and civil rights secured by law; and combating community deterioration and juvenile delinquency.

we will be leaving today with one more example of the failure on the part of all parties to remove natives from their historical image as useless garbage.

Soon after fall term began we discovered that one of the conditions of the school's presence in the community was their admittance of a certain percentage of "trouble" kids. These are other non-native high school students who have been kicked out of both public and private schools for continued behavioral issues. The main foundation that funds the school boasts on their website about NAYA's success, part of which is aided by giving classes focused on Native heritage. Yet my sister filled me in on how the "white kids" in class would snicker and make fun of the images during lectures, thus continuing the devaluing of Natives even within a community that is supposed to be honoring them. The students were also able to participate in an indigenous art class. Working mainly with beads and Plains Indian weaving techniques, the activities of this class come straight out of wild western images of what "Indian" activities consist of. You could get a better idea of native art by ten minutes of Internet research than what gets taught in an entire year through NAYA's regularly scheduled high school program.

With all of these thoughts swimming through my mind, our car at last pulls up to the school. It is located in the old Whitaker Middle School building, which was shut down in 2001 when the growth of radon and mold were discovered. Radon occurs in buildings with very poor ventilation when naturally occurring radium from the local environment decays. As it breaks down, it creates cancer-causing radiation. For years the school

and the lot of land it occupied sat abandoned. "...the former Whitaker building was boarded up but not yet demolished. The building became a haven for graffiti, trash, drug dealing and other crime" (Murphy). In 2006, after five years of complete abandonment by the Portland Public School District, NAYA began leasing the school and its surrounding ten acres. They overlooked the state of the building in favor of excitement: the land the school sits on was once the historic Chinook village site called *Neerchokikoo*.

Happy as the NAYA directors may be that the native community was allowed to buy back sacred land for 2.9 million dollars, the kids don't learn about the historical aspects of the school's location during class. There is barely enough time to attempt getting them up to date on the basic education they need to graduate, not to mention boldly trying to teach them facts about the local history of Chinook Indians. NAYA also had to sink millions of dollars from their grant money to remodel the old middle school just to make it habitable. As we walk into the building in search of my sister, I feel no surprise that the building's layout lead to radon and mold poisoning. Even after the expenditure, the windows remain bolted shut and the blinds are always drawn to prevent light from entering. The small classes of eight or so mixed race students must all feel like they are being washed down the drain whenever they attend class, a small group of problem students sinking in a dark basin.

We arrive at the heart of the building where my younger sister stands, waiting with a look of annoyance on her face. She

couldn't be more ready to leave this place for good. In her hands is a jumble of beaded bracelets and a binder full and doodles and notes to friends. The only evidence that she accomplished any learning while at NAYA is a short report on our family lineage.

My Family's Story

By Kaitlin Rasmussen

Here is our story, as I know it. In the 1840's Dahotra is a young mother. She is married to a Tututin man and they have four young children. Trouble is brewing at the other end of their home on the Rogue River as a flood of immigrants begins to arrive from Missouri.

Gold miners and volunteers commit countless atrocities in their greed for land and gold and we did our best to fight back. The name "Rogue River" came from the fact that the settlers considered the people from the area to be "rogue" or "rascal", both derogatory terms of the day and essentially meaning that they had a reputation for being Rogue Indians, or tough, fighting people.

By the summer of 1856, Dahotra's husband and sons have been killed. In June, the last of the Rogue people surrender to the enemy at Big Bend. Led by Chief Tecumtum (or "John" as the whites called him) they are marched from the river near Agness to Port Orford. There, they are corralled into pens like cattle to await their next move. About 600 of them are put onto the steam ship Columbia and sent north to the coastal reservation at Yachats. The remaining people were forced to walk from Port Orford to the coast reservation and then again to the Siletz reservation.

After all that, Dahotra escapes in 1856. She is 40 years old by now, and accompanied by her crippled daughter who is 20, daughter Chamet who is now 16, and grandbaby Abby who is under 1 year. They travel south to Smith River, CA, where there is a bit more safety than at their old home on the Rogue. Today, the Tolowa tribe is located in Smith River CA, where most of Dahotra's living ancestors reside. Every year a group of Natives walks the 234-mile stretch of land their ancestors were once forced to walk in an event called "Run to the Rogue".²

"Our Story, As I Know It"

² Copyright of Shade, Crystal. *Rogue Indian*. Los Angeles, CA: Writers Guild of America, West, Inc. April 14, 2010.

Each year the students are asked to write a paper giving basic facts and tidbits about a North American tribe of their choosing. As my sister informed me, most of the students choose their own family tribe to represent in their essays. As my mother announces that she has to have a talk with the principal before we can go, we walk together down the dark corridors. Accompanied by my sister's teenage groans of protest, I ask to take a look at her project. She supplements this brief history with an excerpt from *The Native Peoples of the Northwest* by Jan Halliday and Gail Chehak. In it, they relate the story of how gold miners, fur trappers, and farmers had thoroughly infiltrated the traditional lands of the Tututni, Chetco, and Tolowa people along the Rogue River in California. The settlers' "plows and livestock destroyed the grass seeds, acorns, and camas – all important food sources for the Native people. Mining depleted trout and salmon runs. In 1855, the Coast Reservation was created in preparation to receive what would soon be displaced Natives. U.S. troops were put into place to begin the removal of the Native dwellers from the aboriginal lands" (Halliday and Chehak 152). This caused huge tension in the area and, as my sister explained it, the Rogue Indians were so named for their habit of fighting back. There were attacks by whites and Natives alike, which culminated in the Rogue River Wars from 1855 to 1856. When the fighting finally abated, a total of 1,200 Natives accompanied my great-great-great grandmother Dahotra on the march to Port Orford.

A friend of mine who grew up in the town has spoken to me of a sign that once hung there. It told visitors to the town a

tale of military victory over the local Indians in order to “promote the white military version of victory, and gave no context for the Indian ‘uprising’” (152). Erected in the 1950’s the sign was a significant example of the ways in which Indian integrity and ability to hold their own was masked by the government in order to sooth white fear of the Native peoples’ “rogue” nature. So often, Indians are to be seen as nothing more than passive scraps of litter in the woods or on the streets of America, scraps that we can throw out and forget about. Up until the 1960’s citizens of the town even performed a yearly ritual of “commemorating the Rogue Indian Wars by throwing an effigy of an Indian man off Battle Rock, which overlooked the harbor” (152).

Roaming the now empty halls of the school with the short report in my hands, I reflect upon the tearing up of my ancestral land for the harvesting of gold; how invasive dams were built to generate electricity to support the settlers’ way of life. This is not a unique story. In her book, *Recovering the Sacred* Winona LaDuke details the stories of many tribes whose land has been seen merely as a resource to be consumed rather than a sacred space to be honored. I see this kind of imperialist behavior as characteristic of the blindness of science that has been present ever since the Enlightenment. With the quest for absolute truth comes an inability to grasp the implications of such a quest. In Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein,” the character Victor Frankenstein summarizes this Enlightenment philosophy of exclusion in his statement, “Nor could I consider the magnitude and complexity of my plan as any argument of its impracticability” (LaDuke 52).

For the University of Arizona, just as for Victor, scientific reason trumped cultural implications of scientific actions. They moved forward with their controversial plan to erect a telescope on the Apache peoples' sacred mountain *Dzil nchaa si an*, or "Mt. Graham". The university even had enough gall to name it the "Columbus Scope". The Columbus project was begun after thirty solid years of protest not only from the Native community, but also from many activist and environmentalist groups. They explained clearly that the project would harm 25% of the pristine 472-acre spruce fir forest and further endanger many already at-risk animals (25). Investors who wished to proceed with the plan suppressed the knowledge that the telescope would cause harm to the religious practices of the Apache. In the University of Arizona's own library sits the most detailed documentation of the Apache culture on record, complete with interviews with Tribal members and documentation of their oral tradition. Rather than draw upon this knowledge, the project's investors decided to hire an outside "expert" - who has never worked with the Apache and who had never spoke to a living Apache - to downplay the evidence" (25). The investors' role in funding the operation demonstrates how science and the traditional values of the American government are placed above the values and traditions of Native people. The Hopi in New Mexico also experienced the destruction of their land when it was drained of the majority of its natural sources of water and coal. They witnessed the death of their ancestral dry-land farming techniques as settlers superimposed their (unsustainable) irrigation system upon the lower regions of the country.

The Hopi are still fortunate in one aspect: they have been allowed to remain on their ancestral lands. The history of the Northwest Trail of Tears described in my sister's family history project is but one of many accounts of entire tribes of Native peoples being forced off of their land by the U.S. government. Such formal relocations originally began only after strong promises from President Jefferson of an eventual merging of the indigenous and European cultures. He told Indians that they had the opportunity to become the equals of the white people if they could successfully shed all of their traditions in favor of a more "civilized" way of life. This echoes the blindness of science previously characterized by Victor Frankenstein and the advocates for the University of Arizona's telescope.

Still, even this junking of honored traditions in exchange for success in a new system would have been better than the total annihilation the Natives would soon begin to see. Once President Jackson came into power he would change all of the promises made to the Indian population by President Jefferson. In an effort to systematically rob the indigenous people of their rich and fertile land, Jackson put into motion an Indian Removal Bill in 1830. The bill would relocate the "Five Civilized Tribes," which included the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole, from their land in the southeastern United States, to land that would later make up the state of Oklahoma. Not all of the senators were supportive of this bill. One senator was quoted to have said during the debate, "Who can look an Indian in the face and say to him, 'For more than forty years we have made to

you the most solemn of promises. We now violate and trample upon them all but offer to you, in their stead, another guarantee” (Zwonitzer). The second guarantee was that their new homes would be just as good, if not better, than their current ones. Not so foolish as the rest of the settler population thought them to be, the reactions of the Native peoples to such false promise were summed up by one anonymous Indian when he said, “If this land is rich like ours, why is no one else living there?” (Zwonitzer). They recognized the fact that their bountiful land was being stripped from them, and the devaluing of the rights of Native people was furthered by forced marches to the inhospitable barrens of this country. Scholars who attempt to calculate the total loss of life during the removal of the “Five Civilized Tribes” of the southeast number the deaths around four thousand. Historian Russell Thornton provided a more comprehensive analysis of the event, accounting for loss in Native population due to decrease of birthrate along with death. He argues that an astounding ten thousand Cherokees were littered along the trail (Miles).

In the case of California, the Catholic Church’s thirty-two missions coupled with a history of aggressive forty-niners got rid of many of the Indians before any formal relocation was necessary. In the 1850’s Congress also invested two million dollars in the extermination of California Indians offered in the form of small bounties to any successful settler. Even against these odds, some Natives were able to survive. Between 1852 and 1867, three to four thousand Native children in California were kidnapped and

sold as slaves or cheap help in the homes of whites. Some estimates conclude that between 40-80% of Native deaths after the gold rush were caused by venereal diseases, none of which existed among Native populations prior to the arrival of Europeans (LaDuke 69). It can be assumed that nearly every woman and girl was raped, and many were also forced into prostitution. This trade, commonly referred to as “the oldest trade alive,” was not present in aboriginal California. Slavery, prostitution, and the shaming of the lower class are therefore all values of trash that were imposed upon most Native Americans by their colonizers.

It is no wonder my mom drives around town with a bumper sticker that reads, “Sure you can trust the government, just ask an Indian!” The long history of being treated like nothing more than litter on the landscape of the fertile and available American soil has inspired a very unique coping mechanism in the Native population. I couldn’t say when it began, but anyone who has read a short story by Sherman Alexie or seen the actor Graham Greene in one of his less serious films has experienced the trend of sarcasm within modern Native culture. Just look at the title of Alexie’s first novel, “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” and you will get a sense of the humor he brings to the difficult subject within. But this coping mechanism is only a supplemental force to our ability to continue pressuring the government and society alike to recognize Native identity. The sixties was a known era of revolution and empowerment for women and blacks, but the seventies was a significant period in time for red power. Initially, the mass relocations of tribes in the

1800's caused conflicts among tribes who were forced to live together for the first time. The sparks that flew at the outset when warring tribes were placed on the same reservation necessarily burnt out as the people simply tried to survive, and a Pan-Indianism began to develop. The pictures of students I see on the walls here at the NAYA school show me mixed lineage, not only of race but also of native ancestry, and yet the students can bond over a common connection to American indigeneity in general. The Bay Area and Los Angeles became important cities for concentrations of relocated Native populations. In the 1970's the American Indian Movement and other red power groups gained momentum in these California clusters. Organized movements and events such as the 1969 takeover of Alcatraz Island lead to the passage of such acts as the Indian Self-Determination Act, the American Indian Freedom of Religion Act, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. It was also in the late seventies that the sign previously mentioned in Port Orford was finally given a sister-sign to explain the racism found in the old one.

Today my mother walks into small museums in northern California only to find un-named photos of our distant relatives. There are woven baskets that were crafted by the hands of her grandmothers, which she has recovered from behind glass cases where they filled with dust. While they once supplied the practical use of cooking food, today they serve to represent the entire history of costal indigenous cultures from the region. These few simple artifacts are only the remnants of a society of people, and they only exist as important artifacts in museums today because of a

newly developed romanticism for the old ways of Native life. Since cameras were scarce when the tribes were still living their ancestral lifestyle, the only pictures that white people bothered to make them pose for were comprised of princesses in extravagant regalia of shells and grass skirts. The mundane aspects of their lives have either rotted away from lack of preservation or been given a disproportionate amount of significance to justify their place in museums. To people outside of the Native community today, Indians are portrayed as nothing but alcoholics or casino owners, and we struggle to be honored in life rather than just in the romanticized death of our ancestors. I do not think there is a definitive answer to what modern Native identity is, but I believe identity should be developed by the individual rather than ascribed to a group by others, as Indian identity has been for so long.

I am fortunate to know what small amount I do on the subject of Native American history. There are fragments from the Tolowa culture that we practice today, like making baskets from the bark of Western Red Cedar trees. A conversation I overheard when out to dinner a few nights ago now comes to mind. Somehow, a waitress of Cherokee ancestry got to talking about her lineage with a history-buff customer. After exchanging the extent of their knowledge on the Cherokee people with one another, they both admitted to the fact that such history is hard to uncover. Had the man not majored in history at the college level and had the girl not asked her parents about her family's past, then neither of them would have known anything on the subject.

“There is so much we don’t know” the man remarked. “It takes time to uncover, and you only get the perspective of the people who write the books.” LaDuke also commented on this notion of the traditional historian’s perspective and his bias. “Settler historians showed little interest in recording the details of the Native people they encountered or much of the slavery and ongoing rape of Native women. Records account for ‘several,’ ‘many,’ or ‘few’ Native people killed in any given instance, while exact numbers of settler deaths are recorded” (LaDuke 69).

I began this essay by telling you that some of the members of my ancestral tribes were marched off of a cliff during their relocation. My mother recently told me a story about how one woman survived after she was pushed over the edge. She climbed back up the rocks and lived to have children, raise a family, and die of old age. This is what Native people need to do today. Those of us who have survived the massacres must surmount the obstacles and flourish in the face of those who did not believe that we could. This is a pragmatist philosophy of moving forward as a response to our past and current circumstances. As an oppressed people we cannot escape our past, but we also must not let it define us nor prevent us from moving forward.¹⁶ Toni Morrison displayed this idea beautifully in *Beloved* when she wrote, “Know it, but go on out the yard” (Glaude 19). We all must accept history as a force that shapes our decision making today,

¹⁶ See further writing on this subject:
Engle, Karen. *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development*. Duke UP Book and Journal Review: Fall 2010: 25.

but remember that it is not definitive. We must carry it with us consciously as we go forward in the world.

With these thoughts in mind, I emerge through the doors of the oppressive structure of the NAYA school and walk around to the back of the building. There are dumpsters overflowing with trash bags full of left over cafeteria lunches, pressed up against dirty, red brick walls. I think about the Chinook people seeing this sacred ground they once called *Neerchokikoo* in such a state of wreckage and shame. There is at least one consolation to this overly ambitious and under-accomplished school that I now know of. Starting next year, NAYA has been granted the right to teach the Chinook Jargon as a fulfillment of the High School language requirement. Trying to feel the excitement of this fact, I bend down to remove a large Doritos bag from the grass, and toss it into the dumpster.

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DEVIKA BAKSHI

Devika Bakshi is a recently graduated Comparative Literature major. She is interested in Anglophone/post-colonial/historiographic literature, South/West Asian politics, contemporary discourses of multiculturalism and identity politics, and pop culture. After graduation, she hopes to learn about the world first-hand, while continuing to insist on literature's relevance to living.

Nomad Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Scholarship: **Honorable Mention**

Mentor: Moshe Rachmuth

"WE CAN ONLY SURVIVE HERE WHEN WE'RE IN HARMONY"

CONFORMITY, CONSERVATION, AND SURVIVAL IN
HAPPY FEET

A pivotal scene in the 2006 Academy Award winning animated film *Happy Feet* shows the film's protagonist, a little dancing penguin named Mumble, being blamed for his community's recent difficulty finding adequate fish. Noah, the head Elder, reasons that Mumble's "hippity-hop"—the strange penguin tap-dance he does to express himself—is at fault. Noah believes that Mumble's deviance

from the highly valued, socially central norm of singing has provoked the gods to punish the penguins of Emperorland. “It is this kind of backsliding¹,” he says, “that has brought this scarcity upon us. Do you not understand that we can only survive here when we’re in harmony? When you and your foreign friends lead us into your easy ways, you offend the great Guin, you invite him to withhold his bounty.”

This scene performs a curious conflation of ecological survival with social conformity. The community’s “harmony” is easily figured as against Mumble’s “backsliding”, which is seen to undermine that harmony, and thereby weaken the community’s ability to survive ecologically. Ecological and social concerns reappear throughout the film, always intertwined, in various permutations of the same conflation between survival and homogeneity at work in this scene. An unusually harsh winter causes Mumble’s father to drop him as an egg, which results in his irregular development. This is seen to be the cause of his abnormal behavior, which threatens social cohesion, and for

¹ The term “backsliding” has explicitly Christian undertones. Its use here is particularly significant in light of the film’s ongoing preoccupation with religiosity. Indeed, Christianity appears in the film as the primary systemic ideology for the Emperor penguins, an ideology that suppresses and oppresses difference. It is important to note that Christianity per se is not at issue in this essay, so much as the way it is shown to be emblematic of an ideological system. Nevertheless, the choice of Christianity, or Christian-like religiosity as metaphor is significant in light of the time-period in which the film was made. A 2006 critique of Christianity as dominant ideology would certainly resonate with audiences at the height of the Bush administration, with its perceived evangelical bent.

which he is marginalized. As this essay will show, Mumble's marginalization leads him to discover the true threat to his community, which is ecological rather than social. Ultimately, it is his 'abnormality', his difference that enables him to avert the danger and to ensure the penguin community's survival.

It's not hard to read between the lines, here: we must accept the weirdoes, because they're the ones who'll save us. The inclusion of difference literally becomes a matter of life and death. Furthermore, because the film configures survival in explicitly ecological terms, the preservation of heterogeneity takes on all the urgency of ecological conservation. The film suggests that our ability to save the planet, and therefore ourselves, is intricately bound up with our ability to incorporate social difference, to manage heterogeneity. Yet if, as Julia Kristeva suggests, the fundamental mechanism for establishing identity is the abjection, or *exclusion* of that which is a threat to identity, then it would seem counterintuitive that the *inclusion* of difference would ensure survival.

An animated family film with no pretensions to high art is not a likely place in which to unearth such an abstract discourse of social difference. However it is precisely the film's unabashed populism that makes it significant. Because it has no overt intellectual agenda, much of its latent ideology goes unnoticed. Its unobtrusiveness makes it an ideal carrier of popular ideology. The film's popularity attests to the resonance of its problematic message, which slips by the radar under cover of popularity or generic frivolity.

This essay will examine the way in which social inclusivity is shown in this “innocent” film to be essential to ecological survival. It will also tease apart the way in which this social-ecological conflation facilitates an approach to social difference that ignores the necessarily conflicted nature of heterogeneity. Although the film’s approach to social difference may at first appear progressive, its utopic insistence on resolving discomfort is tantamount to dissolving difference. The film guts heterogeneity of its essential irresolvability, and in so doing, produces a vision of society that is highly distortive and dishonest.

In her essay, “Approaching Abjection”, Kristeva contends that the formation of the subject, the “I”, relies on abjection—the expulsion of the abject. The abject, by definition, is “a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside,” which is “ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable,” in order to achieve subjectivity (Kristeva 1). In other words, the abject enables the formation of identity by being removed to the outside—the periphery, the margin—but constantly threatens to encroach on the inside—the core, the mainstream.

For an individual, abjection is a constant process, performed in the daily ejection of waste from the body. Through mechanisms such as excretion, menstruation, sweating, and even hair growth, the body is constantly getting rid of its refuse, of dead cells, toxins, useless material—anything that has outlived its purpose. Removing such “dead” material keeps the body alive.

Death occurs when the entire body becomes waste, when the subject's physical border is totally breached by the abject. The subject relies, for its own survival, on daily abjection—the constant process of keeping death, the ultimate abject, at bay by systematically expelling it beyond the physical boundary of the subject.

Similarly, a society's identity is maintained by preventing the breach of its social boundaries by the abnormal insider, or of its geographical boundaries by the invading outsider. This would make minorities and immigrants—because of their difference, their marginality, their “outsiderness” — the social abject; that which threatens the norm, the mainstream, the inside; that which, by the very fact of its existence, undermines social identity.

Trash, too, is abject—a collection of little fragments of dead material, ejected from the inside only to end up on the periphery, threatening to encroach back upon the ecosystem, to eat into it, to poison it, to choke it. If shit is our individual abject, minorities and immigrants our social abject, then trashcans and landfills are our ecological abject. Each of these things threatens the integrity of the system, and therefore its existence. Each of these things must be kept at bay in order to survive. Unfortunately, this is quite literally impossible with trash. There is no viable outside space to which the tons and tons of waste produced by human civilization can be relegated, never to be seen again. The only plausible solutions are not to produce it in the first place—which would require a complete rebuilding of human civilization—or, failing that, to make like an ecosystem and recycle.

In an ideal state, an ecosystem is, by definition, self contained and self-sustaining. It recycles everything, throws nothing away. It exists without abject. Trash is not endemic to such an ecosystem; it is entropic. It is the result of some internal aberration, of some glitch in the system. That glitch is us. It is human consciousness, after all, that makes such a thing as abjection even thinkable. If, as Kristeva contends, abjection *is* essential to the human process of self-definition, then human society establishes itself by expelling trash. We remove trash to the outside in order to maintain a certain kind of inside. It would be impossible for us to live the way we do if we had to keep and live among all the trash we produce. The absence of trash quite literally enables our presence.

It is apparent, then, that human abjection of material trash is responsible for the threat to the environment. Our efforts to save the planet betray a recognition of this. Eco-friendly practices and ideals such as recycling and sustainability are, in essence, a mimicry of the mechanics of an ideal ecosystem. Through them, we are attempting to restore our damaged ecosystem to its ideal state where everything has a purpose within the system—there is no outside, no abject, no threat. By following this ecosystemic model, we hope to eliminate abjection entirely, thereby diffusing the threat to the planet and saving ourselves.

Happy Feet deliberately demonstrates the threat to the ecosystem posed by human abjection of trash. The penguins of “Emperorland”, and other species around them, are struggling to

survive because unsustainable fishing practices are, as one human puts it “messing with their food chain”. Not only have they been deprived of their own prey, they are also having to contend with fiercer predators, who have begun to hunt penguins for lack of fish. In addition, human debris is polluting their habitat, changing their coastal landscape, and, in some cases, actually killing them. Macaroni penguin Lovelace, the self-proclaimed guru, is gradually being choked to death by the plastic six-pack rings he wears around his neck, which he claims are a “sacred talisman, bestowed [on him] by the mystic beings.” Lovelace’s six-pack rings function beautifully as a nexus of the film’s ideological concerns. The endowment of a piece of garbage with religious significance speaks to the hollow randomness of religious iconography, and to the arbitrariness of systemic ideology as a whole. By creating, rather than simply adopting, a religious symbol Lovelace shows himself to be more arbiter than mere conformist—doubly committed to and responsible for the ideology of which the film is critical. It is no accident that the symbol of his commitment to the ideology is choking him. The film imagines religiosity, quite literally, as fatally constricting. The six-pack rings represent the combined threat of intolerant ideology and material abjection, steadily eroding the penguins’ ability to exist as a socius and as a species.

Indeed, the film demonstrates not only the threat to penguin life posed by trash, but the way in which it interferes with penguin society. The presence of strange objects in their habitat causes speculation about “aliens” and leads to a dispute about the cause of the food shortage. Noah’s assertion that “none

but the great Guin has the power to give and take away” is an expression of the community’s mythology. Within its framework, the lack of fish is understood to be an act of god, punishment, perhaps, for some transgression. The suggestion that the scarcity of fish is caused by aliens threatens to throw into doubt penguin mythology, to confuse their world-view and undermine their established social identity. In an effort to protect that identity, Noah vilifies Mumble. He reasons that Mumble’s fast-catching hippity-hop, by straying from the social norm, has created disharmony and displeased the gods. The palpable religious undertone of this sequence raises the stakes, emphasizes the importance of harmony, and of conformity. Further, the belaboring of the religious metaphor reaffirms the film’s continuing critical preoccupation with religion, which is seen, once again and not for the last time, as being rigid and intolerant of difference.

Mumble has always been different. His inability to sing impairs his ability to function in society, to participate in essential rites of passage that are organized around singing. Indeed, it is repeatedly pathologized, treated and spoken of as a *disability*. It is explained as a result of irregular development owing to his being dropped as an egg. The human equivalent of such an explanation might be to attribute a child’s difficulty with language to the fact he or she was dropped on their head as a baby. The linguistic nature of my analogy is not accidental. Mumble’s very name alludes to a kind of linguistic impairment. To mumble is to fail to speak. In psychoanalytic terms, linguistic impairment represents a failure to enter into the symbolic realm of language.

Language is crucial because it allows one to iterate, thereby constituting oneself as the speaking subject. To fail to speak is to linger in the pre-linguistic semiotic, the realm of the body's chaotic rhythms and vicissitudes. In other words, to fail to speak is to continue to give in to the body's basic animality.

In the film, singing is the penguin equivalent of language. The corollary to identity in this formulation is the "heart-song." For penguins, the heart song is the most honest expression of the self, of "who you truly are". In fact, "a penguin without a heart song is hardly a penguin at all." The heart-song is how a penguin expresses himself, iterates himself, and so establishes himself. Because he cannot sing, Mumble is seen to have no heart song, and therefore no identity. His dancing is to singing as mumbling would be to speaking—only a partial achievement of subjectivity. Mumble's name, therefore, represents his inability to iterate himself, to enter into the symbolic order, and so to participate in society. Mumble's attempts to participate literally destroy harmony: his singing interferes with everyone else's. His dancing, on the other hand, is highly compatible with singing, and even enhancing. It begins to catch on. The spread of the hippity-hop represents, as mumbling would, a deepening encroachment of the pre-linguistic realm into the symbolic order. According to Kristeva, the symbolic realm is the realm of law. Language, for instance, is governed by laws of grammar, syntax, patriarchy. The symbolic seeks, through law, to control the semiotic threat, thus constituting itself. The spread of Mumble's "hippity-hop," in other words, is a disruption of order, a subversion of law, a failure of

the symbolic to restrain the semiotic. In order to uphold or maintain the symbolic order, that which disrupts must be expelled, or abjected.

Mumble is clearly the abject, threatening to dismantle society. By the sheer fact of his difference, he causes social disorder and disharmony. Therefore, when Noah attributes the shortage of fish to social disharmony, he is blaming it on social difference. Through the figure of Mumble, social heterogeneity becomes conflated with the threat to ecological survival. This particular conflation is crucial because it mandates that difference be dissolved in order to avert the threat. Mumble's father Memphis confirms this in his plea to Mumble: "You must renounce your so-called friends, your peculiar thoughts, your strange ways. If we are devout, sincere in our praise, the fish will return."

The suggestion of conformity as a solution resonates with the ecosystemic model, which, as I discussed earlier, problematizes human abjection. Absolute conformity pre-empts the possibility of an abject, thereby precluding abjection, and preventing ecological threat. The dissolution of heterogeneity saves the planet. This approach is eventually subverted in the film, which makes a very deliberate point of criticizing the elder's insistence on conservatism, conformity, and homogeneity. Instead, the film appears to be in favor of difference, of plurality, going as far as to imply that it will save the world. This is evident in its obvious glorification of Mumble's difference, a vindication of his refusal to conform. However, the grand narrative gesture of acceptance defeats its own purpose. The ease of Mumble's

incorporation into the mainstream lays waste to the notion of difference in the first place, and only reasserts homogeneity. The only reason Mumble is exempt from conforming to society in the end is because society conforms to him.

Mumble's initial refusal to conform is motivated by a rejection of the notion that his difference is to blame for the scarcity. Expelled from the penguin community for this refusal, he sets out to find the real cause of the crisis. Fittingly, a trail of trash leads him to the aliens he suspects are responsible for the scarcity of fish. His suspicions are confirmed when he sees a fishing boat pulling massive quantities of fish from the ocean. He swims after them a long way, far from the Antarctic, and gets lost in the ocean. Eventually, he washes up on the coast of a big city and is put in an aquarium. He recognizes the humans around him as the aliens described to him earlier in the film as "beings like big ugly penguins with fat flabby faces and front-ways eyes, no feathers, no beaks, and these...appendages." He tries to catch their attention in various ways, to ask why they are taking all the fish, but nothing works until he tries the hippity-hop. When he does, he sparks a media blitz. The humans holding him decide to follow him to his natural habitat, presumably in order to find the community of dancing penguins.

Mumble returns to Emperorland with a tracking device on his back, proof of the existence of aliens, and of Mumble's contact with them. Seeing this, his fellow penguins are less amenable to Noah's explanation of scarcity as being the result of

Mumble's difference, and start joining in the hippity-hop that Mumble insists will get the aliens' attention. Noah and the elders resist, continuing to hold onto their Guin mythology. But when humans finally do arrive in Emperorland, even Noah begins to dance, privileging a shot at survival over notions of conformism and harmony. Everyone begins to hippity-hop for fish.

A montage of human reactions to the spectacle follows. Although not everyone agrees about what to do, they all manage, curiously—and fortunately—to correctly interpret the dancing as protest. It is highly significant that humans interpret the penguin “hippity-hop” as communication at all. The conferral of sentience, of pseudo-linguistic skill onto a non-human species, besides being essential to the mechanics of the narrative's primary metaphor—penguin society as human society—is telling of the film's confusion. To imagine penguins as having symbolic fluency comprehensible to humans is an act of ludicrous and all too convenient anthropomorphism, and yet another conflation of the ecological with the social. Penguins lend themselves particularly to such anthropomorphism, what with their upright stance and tuxedo-ed appearance—animality in the guise of human sophistication. Throughout the film the penguins of “Emperorland” function, for all intents and purposes, exactly like humans. Until they encounter actual humans, at which point they appear as penguins, but are still seen to operate on a symbolic register similar enough to humans to be able to communicate with them. The suggestion that nature might function the same way human society does is a mere corollary of the suggestion

that human society must be made to function like nature—i.e. the ecosystemic model discussed earlier—both of which are perfectly in keeping with the film’s systematic side-stepping of irresolvable difference.

This tendency achieves its apotheosis at the film’s conclusion. A decision to ban fishing in the Antarctic is followed by another montage depicting Emperorland post-ban—harmonious, hippity-hopping, and full of fish. At the end of the film, it seems, the ecosystem and penguin society have been restored to harmony and balance, all thanks to social difference. This is the film’s final, disconcerting, self-congratulatory image: a utopian world of abundance, where social difference is encouraged and is completely unproblematic. In truth, difference is nowhere preserved; it is merely assimilated, integrated, recycled into the norm. The universal adoption of the hippity-hop represents an appropriation of the marginal to the mainstream. Non-conformity becomes conformist. Erstwhile heterogeneity blends seamlessly into a fresh social fabric—still homogenous, albeit slightly altered in color.

The social utopia envisioned by the film is uncannily comfortable and happy. It glosses over the essential conflicts and difficulties of a truly heterogeneous society, rendering it eerily harmonious. It undermines the experience of those who are socially different, by presenting a false picture of society restored to harmony through a rigorous ethic of acceptance and assimilation. Indeed, it glamorizes harmony as the endpoint of a discourse of social difference—an endpoint whose desirability I find questionable, to say nothing of its viability.

The ripening of the discourses of identity politics and multiculturalism has rendered suspect such utopic, assimilationist visions for society. Mary Louise Pratt, for instance, expresses a deep mistrust of the kind of “imagined...syntheses” through which “a social world (might be) unified and homogenized” with respect to the dominant cultural authority (5). Such a synthesis leads inevitably to an elision of difference that completely dilutes and dismantles a society’s pretense to heterogeneity or multiculturalism. Social difference is fact and conflict is inevitable, even productive, as exemplified by Pratt’s notion of a “contact zone”, in which the very irresolvability of heterogeneity is the basis for meaning-making. Conflict is utterly necessary to the formation and comprehension of identity in modern society. That notions of otherness are essential to identity cannot be ignored. This is not to argue, necessarily, for Kristeva-style abjection, and certainly not for the inevitability of subject-object hierarchies. There are multiple multicultural modes of understanding identity, difference, and conflict that are perhaps more egalitarian in their rhetoric or approach to difference. But none can ignore the necessity of difference or of conflict.

The film’s insistence on synthesizing difference, on resolving conflict completely undermines its purported pro-heterogeneity stance. Human society cannot be made to function in the “harmonious” way nature is imagined to do. Even if recycling all of our trash repairs the damage to our ecosystem and restores environmental harmony, no amount of assimilation or integration will magically heal and harmonize society, nor

should it. This, ultimately, is the great ideological weakness of the film—and perhaps of popular social discourse—it doesn't quite grasp that just as there can be no social diagnosis for an ecological problem, the ecosystemic model cannot solve human problems.

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*G*AMER AND SUBJECTIVE
DISPLACEMENT

JADE SNELLING

Jade Snelling is a sophomore double-majoring in Comparative Literature and Math, but is more than willing to declare that the former is her true love, while she only dabbles in the latter. Her primary focus is in German literature, and she has a strong interest in psychoanalysis and cultural theory.

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*G*amer, Mark Neveldine's and Brian Taylor's 2009 dystopic action/thriller, embodies trash in multiple ways, accomplishing this primarily through its constructions of power-relations (sociopolitical, sexual, economic, etc.). Indeed, through the film's deployment of the human body as "trash" and its pointed exaggeration of late capitalist logic, it articulates an argument about subjectivity; that is, it posits the

body itself as an indispensable, integral part of human subjectivity and ethical interrelation. In point of fact, the film actually delineates the “sanctity of the human” by representing human bodies as disposable, as refuse, as interchangeable (Critchley, Simon and Dews 9). In the context of the film, set approximately 20 years in the future, “lived” experience is commodified through two interactive simulation games: “Society” and “Slayers.” Both rely on the concept of completely mediated human experience, where people pay to control live human beings as avatars.¹ “Society” is similar to a live version of *Sims*, the ultimate role-play fantasy in which a player (with the icon’s body as vehicle) can take drugs, participate in degrading sex acts, and, put more generally, “party,” whereas “Slayers” is the futuristic counterpart to *Halo*, which is a socially sanctioned way for players to experience “the thrill of the kill” with convicted criminals (indeed, “bona fide death row inmates”) as their “icons.”² Each of these inmates is offered the chance to participate in the game, where if they survive for thirty sessions they will be set free. In both cases, the icon, while being the passive agent subject to the will of a “player,” must suffer the psychological, physical, and social ramifications of the acts he or she is forced—by an “other”—to commit. Within the film, the icons themselves are considered to be the “dregs of society:” they are stigmatized and more or less considered subhuman.

¹ Avatar: form chosen by a user to represent him or herself within the context of a virtual simulation.

² In the context of the film, the words “avatar” and “icon” are used interchangeably.

First, to offer something in the way of methodology, this paper will deconstruct this film's claims regarding subjectivity primarily using a Lacanian psychoanalytic lens, often in conjunction with Marxist theory. That is, through the film's structured subversion of late capitalist logic, including its representations of modes of production, commodification, etc., it articulates a claim about the human subject. To quickly define the term "subject," it is worth pursuing a conception of it in terms of Lacanian aphanasis, where the term aphanasis here literally means disappearance. Lacan writes in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, "There is no subject without, somewhere, aphanasis of the subject, and it is this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established...There is an emergence of the subject at the level of meaning only from its aphanasis in the Other locus, which is that of the unconscious."³ This division in the subject which he describes is one of internalized alterity (otherness), where the other is the only means of making the subject thinkable. Indeed, this is proven by the individual's very entry into language, which Lacan theorizes with his concept of the "Mirror Stage:" the stage at which an infant is able to recognize its own image (as in a mirror).

What is the significance of this moment? It signifies an entry into language, the Symbolic, and as such is not only the moment at which the subject recognizes its separation from some sort of pre-Symbolic whole, but the assumption of a specular image. In order to then mediate the gap between itself (the

particular) and the whole (the Symbolic, others, the universal) it recognizes that it must enter into language. However, this involves the internalization of the universal within the particular, the internalized gaze of the other, which takes the form of the ideal Ego and the ego-ideal. It is then this movement between this internalized gaze and the subjective gaze which determines the subject. Thus, a dialectic emerges, which is where the concept of aphanasis also takes shape. The subject is not something which is merely self-determined, but something which is dialectically determined by moving back and forth between perceptions of the self. It is the treatment of the self as an object, which then leads to the determination of the self as a subject.

Now that a working understanding of the subject has been established, we'll delve into a reading of the film. The film is a critique of the semiotics and the extreme mediation of late capitalism, and their deplorable effects in terms of human subjectivity. This critique is rendered primarily through the omnipresent semiotic advertisement campaigns represented over and over again, or through the character of Ken Castle who appears as the "invisible" hand of the market, the puppeteer, the overseer who exercises complete control over the actions of millions of small others. In the plot, Ken Castle has created a world-wide phenomenon by introducing the physiology-altering technology which allows for the existence of his gaming empire. This technology allows for the replication of manufactured neural cells in a human subject, which in turn allows for remote access functionality. That is, as these brain cells reproduce in a subject,

said subject may then be controlled by a gamer from some remote location. The film's plot centers around a couple, one of which is an ex-military operative convicted of murder, John Tillman, known by the name "Kable," who works as an avatar in "Slayers," the other his wife who, in order to make ends meet, takes a job as an avatar in "Society." The film opens with a brief montage of worldwide advertisement campaigns, after which it cuts to a bombardment of brutal and disorienting images, which take place in a "Slayers" simulation. In this simulation two icons (so-called "genericons," avatars programmed to perform a single motion over and over again, with no one controlling them and without any means of reacting within the game, who, incidentally, only need to survive a single session in order to earn their freedom) stand endlessly exchanging fake money while people and objects are blown up within extremely close proximity. This stands as the perfect visual metaphor for the game itself—it is the endless exchange of meaningless signifiers as performed over and over again—the function of the motion is essentially empty, it only consists in a changing of hands.

Here one can see the film explicitly linking consumerism and death drive. Indeed, the mindlessly repetitive and suicidal acts of these virtual automata, although not necessarily featured at length in this film, contribute to its critical trajectory. In this case, the pre-programmed motions (where the term "pre-programmed" further intimates notions of late capitalism, with the more or less manufactured "need" to consume) of the icon present a metaphor for a consumerist ethos. These sets of repetitive

acts, which in and of themselves hold no significance, are merely consumerist performatives, which in the context of the game result in death. This is a reflection of the inhuman excess at the core of desire, which, resulting in an excess, seeks its own masochistic punishment in the death drive. It should be noted that the term “performative” is herein used in the sense in which critical theorist Judith Butler uses it. That is, as that “reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 2). Here, it is meant that discourse has the ability to reproduce itself within the individual; it is an embodiment or internalization of the macrocosmic in the microcosmic. Similarly, the film once again makes this link explicit when Castle makes reference to the overwhelming semiotic and mechanistic quality of the late consumer. He remarks dubiously, “Six months’ time I could have a hundred million people—converted. Ditch diggers, porn stars, and presidents. Not one would be the wiser. A hundred million people would buy what I want ‘em to buy, vote how I want ‘em to vote, do pretty much anything I damn well feel they ought to do” (Nevelidine/Taylor 01:18:22). Isn’t what he describes here the imposing power of discourse? Isn’t this the role advertising takes on today? Yet, to the extent which his technology renders its victims with absolutely no choice, this appears to be the final state in the evolution of the capitalist process. The film represents a discursive machine so powerful it offers no form of resistance.

Another key critical question addressed in the film follows a rather Baudrillardian thread. This concern being that, barring the “actual” human body from the realm of social relations, the

simulation of society can obviously never be “real” with regard to the subject, precisely because people do *not* act on their desires using their own bodies, but use the bodies of others as the objects of or conduits to their desires. A player expresses a psychological identity within the context of a physical fiction. However, does the simulation reveal a second, greater fiction—the symbolic fiction of day to day life, the mask worn in everyday society? It seems that this second “perverse” fiction (a disavowed reality) exists and is stigmatized precisely because it maintains that “other” fiction. In this way, the two are mutually deterministic. Yet when the avatars themselves are found to be repulsive miscreants, not in the context of the game but in that of day-to-day life, we find the other segment of society in the film struggling with the doubt that these avatars are active agents, who secretly find enjoyment in their degrading work. For the society represented in the film, appearance is opted for in lieu of reality; in fact, “reality itself turns into appearance” (Zizek 29). That is, the simulation itself structures reality in the sense that it determines the way in which these avatars interact with society and the way it interacts with them. This is a feminist critique which the film renders: Nika, even more than her husband, encounters this social aversion. This aversion in itself is actually akin to that felt for the classical femme fatale in film noir, as critical theorist Slavoj Zizek writes, “the moment when she appears as an entity without substance, as a series of inconsistent masks without a coherent ethical attitude” is the moment when fascination turns to aversion (“Looking Awry” 54). So it is the

switch between avatar and fully functional human being which renders her an incoherent subject, one which must be rejected in order to re-establish her status as an object.

Much of the film is concerned with subjects struggling with and against the traumatic core of their constitutive lack. As Žižek writes: “There is no positive-substantial determination of man: man is the animal which recognizes itself as man, what makes him human is this formal gesture of recognition as such, not the recognized content. Man is a lack which, in order to fill itself in, recognizes itself as something” (Parallax 44). So, this “lack” is that which is determined by the concept of “minimal difference” (the difference of something from itself), in which the subject is only ever recognized as a signifier, as a semblance which is characterized by non-coincidence with the self. This is the lack of “positive-substantial determination” of which Žižek speaks. As the dregs of society, these sex/death workers are forced to labor under the burden of misrecognition: they are misrecognized by society at large as human subjects.

Furthermore, the gamer/player’s participation in the “Slayers” game is a means by which the common citizen can become an active participant in corporal punishment. Castle even mentions that the game was put together with the full cooperation of the United States Government, as though that were the ultimate form of political legitimization. If anything, these players’ mindless acts, which satisfy the passive desire to consume a cultural product, re-enforces this system itself, rendering them fully complicit. By presenting a gaming universe in which this

killing is socially sanctioned, it removes the gamer from the real implications of his or her actions—that is, the fact that he or she is actually murdering living human beings. In this capacity, the film also engages a discourse on the implications of the late capitalist state devolving into a fascist regime. It involves what Walter Benjamin would have deemed the clear “aestheticization of politics,” making public execution more palatable to the public. Indeed, at the end his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he analyzes the fascist propaganda machine, concluding that this “aestheticization of politics,” shown in the posters of beautiful youths advertising Nazi ideology, which stands opposed to a “politicization of art.” Here there is a two-fold latent ideology lurking behind the veneer of Castle’s creation: there is the presentation of human beings as objects of consumerist desire and there is this consumption of violence in a mediated and aestheticized form. This form, which is a simulation, alienates the player (the controller) from the raw physical and psychological “product” (damage) of his own “labor.”

Often throughout the film, one will find that the spectacle of the crowd itself is incorporated into the culture of violence the film represents. Indeed, the film seems to enjoy intercutting scenes from the spectacle and the act of being a spectator. For instance, when Kable manages to get through his 29th battle, the viewer sees a wide array of jubilant crowd reactions from all across the globe. So when Kable “wins,” it becomes clear that he is “heroized,” and that the way the crowd experiences him and the game diverges grossly from his own lived experience of himself

and the game. To an extent, the relation of the crowd to the spectacle represents a very clear alienation from the means of production and a resultant mystification. Kable seems to obtain an almost “auratic” quality, indeed, Castle does as well; this is, in a sense, the capitalistic genius of the diffuse advertisement campaigns which deploy Castle’s and Kable’s faces as consumable cultural objects. It inhibits ethical interrelation between human beings.

We experience this in a number of ways throughout the film. Often times it is undermined by the clear process of humanization and encounters with the traumatic real which dispel this mystification (the auratic quality). The film deploys the subject in this way as a means to establish ethical interrelation. For instance, when during the game, Kable witnesses a plenitude of dismembered, burning, or otherwise maimed human bodies, not to mention the sudden and messy death of his recently humanized comrade Sandra, who just before had repeated the phrase “My name is Sandra,” it is clear that his position is not one that demands hero worship, but one that demands a deeply shared feeling of horror. The scene’s almost immediate follow-up of the delighted crowd reaction underscores this effect all the more. It is a return to the notion of the aestheticization of violence, violence as something which is performed for the viewing pleasure of a sadistic audience, an audience which fails to recognize the destruction it revels in. They are very clearly alienated from the real implications of the product they consume and legitimize.

Certainly, Kable is packaged, marketed, and consumed worldwide, such that in an exchange between Castle and his minions when he discusses in minute detail the pre-planned spectacle of Kable's demise, he elaborates and depoliticizes the his own systemic logic.

Castle: Look at it, the new face of "Slayers": pure, crystallized horror two stories high and bathed in bloody red. He is what *they want*.

Flunky: They love Kable.

Castle: They do now. But when they watch their hero die right in front of their eye-balls so sharp and vivid it feels like you can reach out and touch the wet flesh they're gonna change their point of view. They'll be seduced by the power, the violence, the dominance—it's human nature. (27:40)

What he describes is capitalist modes of production; he is going to replace Kable with yet another slayer. Furthermore, he ascribes this late capitalist mode of production and consumption to "human nature." He takes capitalist logic and naturalizes it. By taking Kable as a game persona, something which is produced and consumed, following Castle's line of thought he *has* to be replaced. In describing objects within the context of the spectacle of consumption (in the late capitalist sense) Marxist theorist Guy Debord writes, "Too late, [the product of consumption] reveals its essential poverty, a poverty that inevitably reflects the poverty of its production. Meanwhile, some other object is already replacing it as representative of the system and demanding its own moment of acclaim" (Debord 64).⁵ This pathology of consumption mirrors Kable's replacement product. Debord goes on to write,

The fraudulence of the satisfactions offered by the system is exposed by this continual replacement of products and of general conditions of production. In both the diffuse and the concentrated spectacle, entities that have brazenly asserted their definitive perfection nevertheless end up changing, and only the system endures... Each *new lie* of the advertising industry is an *admission* of its previous lie. (64)

To be sure, the film uses portrays gratuitous violence and bloodshed in order to show the ultimate devolvement of the capitalist superstructure, which unabashedly markets bodies for passive consumption. Through its constructions of horror and late capitalist semiotics, *Gamer* is a clear critique of the latest stage in consumerist evolution—manufactured “need,” and the aestheticization and commodification of violence. Moreover, it engages capitalist logic by assuming it an exaggerated and excessive way, whereby it exploits the trashed subject in order to at once undermine this logic and posit the sanctity of the subject.

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CHARLEANE WADE

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RECYCLING SÉRAPHINE LOUIS

OUTSIDER MYTHOLOGIES IN MARTIN PROVOST'S
SÉRAPHINE

Amidst the echo of explosions and flashes of light illuminating her sparsely furnished flat, a middle-aged woman dressed in coarse work clothes kneels beside an unfinished painting of a tree, heavy with fantastic fruits in shades of gold and red. She paints with ecstatic urgency and pauses only a second to acknowledge the tremor of her apartment building violated by the encroaching war. She paints with single-minded

purpose. She paints as if through painting she continues to stay alive. By the flame of a single candle, she accentuates the fruit with a hint of red applied with bare fingertips. Spitting on her fingers, she blends the red into a blur of gold. She takes a swig of homemade wine and grabs her paintbrush. Accompanied only by the music of bombs, she gazes in earnest at her creation and hovers over it like a guardian angel. The artist, *Séraphine Louis*, then sweeps her brush along the edges of apples, as if caressing each one with devoted attention.

Witnessing *Séraphine* in the act of creation, I participate in the “discovery” of her talent and, thus, this “naive” 20th century French painter enters the 21st century. Prior to the debut of director Martin Provost’s film, *Séraphine*, few would have known of this obscure, working-class artist who spent the last years of her life at the psychiatric hospital in Clermont-de-l’Oise and even fewer would have seen the exhibitions of her work in Paris or Senlis (Vircondelet 9). When the credits roll at the end of the film, I leave with a sense that I have become the living vessel for the memory of *Séraphine Louis* and her lost artistic genius. Just as the German art collector and critic, Wilhelm Uhde, discovered a self-taught painter in his ordinary housekeeper, the film provides me the exhilaration of watching a homely, middle-aged peasant transform into a model of inspiration. Rediscovering *Séraphine Louis* through Martin Provost’s vision, I retrieve her life and her work from the trash heap of forgotten and unacknowledged artists.

And yet, who is this *Séraphine* that I have retrieved from the trash heap? To what extent has Martin Provost set out to portray

S raphine as a character rooted in history? To what extent has Provost succeeded in representing the historical S raphine? Is she an accurate representation of the “actual” artist or is she simply a character recreated according to Provost’s impressions of whom an “outsider” artist ought to be?

Provost has created a biopic that arises loosely from historical fact, but makes no claim to objectivity. The film is a fictional account of S raphine Louis’s first meeting and later friendship with her patron, Wilhelm Uhde. Close-up shots throughout the film strive to represent S raphine’s life from the eye of the artist, which of course is also the eye of the director. These scenes represent Provost’s vision of an inner life he can imagine, but never ascertain. And so, just as the film recycles S raphine Louis, it also reconstructs her. It rearranges her life to fit the classic “discovery story” of the marginalized artist by an educated “insider” who has the power to define culture and cultural artifacts (Fine 98). Thus, S raphine becomes symbolic of an ideal self-expression, an authentic creativity that must be cultivated on the periphery of culture, but enjoyed from within it. And yet, where the film perpetrates this myth, it also resists it. *S raphine* meticulously constructs the dichotomy between insider and outsider while simultaneously deconstructing that relationship. Martin Provost portrays S raphine’s descent into psychosis as a tale of resistance. Madness, in the end, is the ultimate defense against a 20th century art world that celebrates “naive,” folk and outsider artists, but refuses to accept them into the circles of high society.

I am complicit in this vision when I allow the director's eye to become my own, when I fail to question my own fascination with the myth of the "mad genius," the "alienated artist," the vindicated "outsider." During the two-hour duration of the film, I am privy to *Séraphine's* most intimate perceptions of her world. I watch entranced as the middle-aged artist roams the countryside in a blue shawl and carries a basket for collecting herbs, river clay, and even blood gathered at a local butcher shop to form the pigments she will need to paint. I know, for a moment, a woman who receives counsel and encouragement from her guardian angel. I admire her passion, her drive to conquer the world for art. Here is an artist profoundly involved with the world around her. A person who sees dappled light in the tree branches, touches river silt with her bare hands, swims naked. Here is an artist who hovers intently over a canvas sprawled out on the floor, paints with her fingers, sleeps rarely, if at all. By the end of the film, I am enchanted by Provost's artistic vision to such a degree that I dread to uncover its artifice. Through *Séraphine*, Provost has recreated not history, but a dangerous dream, the myths of the "mad genius," the "modern primitive," the "alienated artist" that have clung desperately to the biographies of European and American painters these last two centuries.

To better understand how *Séraphine* perpetuates "outsider" mythologies it is necessary to examine the genre of the art biopic, the motives that drive the creation of such films and their implicit audiences. *Séraphine* continues the tradition of the European/American art biopic that became popular in the

1930's with the release of such films as *Rembrandt* and *Lust for Life* (a biopic of Vincent Van Gogh). Overall, such biopics have strayed from a historical representation of the artists in question. The biopic – a term composed of the words “biography” and “picture” or film – is not a documentary and nor does it pretend to be, though the genre contains just enough historical fact to confuse the issue. In *Art and Artists on Screen*, John A. Walker writes that directors and producers of feature films “have few qualms about inserting completely invented material such as fictional characters, conversations and works of art. In this confusion of layers and sources, truth and invention, it becomes very difficult even for the knowledgeable viewer to disentangle fact from fiction” (Walker 13). If the artist on screen does not represent the artist it claims to portray, who and what does it represent? The vision of the director? A cultural stereotype projected into a historical context?

Séraphine, like the art biopics that precede it, relies on a mixture of fact and fiction to recreate Séraphine's “discovery” by Wilhelm Uhde. In *Séraphine de Senlis*, a biography of the artist published in France in 1986, Alain Vircondelet validates many of the claims made by the film: Séraphine Louis worked as a domestic servant before World War I and during that time she reports hearing the voice of her guardian angel who commands her to pursue a career in painting. Séraphine follows the counsel of this “angel” though she is in her early 40's and lacks the skill, social status and financial backing to embark on an artistic career (Vircondelet 11). During the years 1906-1912, Séraphine taught

herself to paint, despite the ridicule of her employer and a teacher from whom she intended to take lessons (11, 18). On the edge of World War I, the art critic and collector, Wilhelm Uhde, a collector of self-taught and “naive” art, discovered his housekeeper, Séraphine as a self-taught painter and encouraged her to continue painting (44). At the dawn of World War I, Uhde returned to Germany and Séraphine continued to perfect her painting technique while the war raged around her in Senlis, France until Uhde returned to France to seek out the painters he had left behind (48). In addition, Vircondelet’s biography validates Séraphine’s mental breakdown and subsequent commitment to the psychiatric hospital, where she lived until she died in 1942 (1). These are the facts in which Provost grounds his vision of Séraphine Louis, but they by no means comprise the most important aspects of the film. Such facts merely create the skeleton of a “reality” that Provost fills with his own impressions and interpretations of the artist’s inner life.

Presenting Séraphine’s biography, not as a documentary, but as a biopic, Martin Provost and his co-writer, Marc Abdlenour, have “[imposed] an inevitable transformation on...[the] raw [historical data] with the consequence that the perfect reproduction of the past is an impossible ideal” (Walker 14). The biopic shares certain conventions with the novel that make it a particularly inadequate medium for conveying historical fact. As a dramatic retelling of a biography, the biopic requires both an essential conflict and a narrative arch, which culminates in a climax of tension and then concludes. The artist’s life, it goes

without saying, is too complex to resemble the plot of a screenplay or include any one essential conflict. The screenwriter must therefore mold the biography to fit the needs of the medium: it must amplify a conflict that may not have driven the actual artist and select an episode from the artist's life that includes adequate dramatic tension to drive the narrative. Herein lies the seed of the vision that the director, the actors, the cinematographer, the set-designers will further shape with their own artistic sensibility.

In *Séraphine*, Martin Provost and co-writer Marc Abdlenour focus the narrative on that episode of Séraphine's life when she first meets her patron, Wilhelm Uhde. They could, of course, have begun the narrative from a point much earlier in her life—the artist was nearly 42 years-old when she first began to paint and did not meet her patron for yet another eight years (Vircondelet 39). By choosing to begin the film in 1914 instead of 1906, Provost constructs a “discovery” story, wherein the conflict relies on the “outsider” artist's discovery by a patron and reaches a climax at the point of the artist's acceptance or rejection by the bourgeois art establishment. The theme of acceptance versus alienation fuels the plot, so that, when Séraphine cannot cope with her mixed reception from bourgeois art circles, she chooses the path of extreme alienation—psychosis. In this way, Séraphine's descent into psychosis fits neatly into the theme of the film and, in fact, drives the film to its ultimate climax. For Provost, a sane Séraphine would lack dramatic tension and so it is his good fortune that this necessary plot device coincides nicely with known historical fact.

Given the inadequacy of the biopic as a source of factual information, why has the genre become prolific in Europe and America in the last twenty years? Certainly, few biopics receive the financial and critical success so coveted by producers of mass media, and the audience for the art biopics is particularly small, considering that the fine arts have historically entertained an elite and educated connoisseur. John Walker explores this question in his analysis of the 20th century art biopic. He asserts that the traditional role of the art biopic is to depict “the relationship of artists and society” (Walker 16). If indeed there was once a time that the profession of “artist” did not exist, when artisans and craftsmen were still integrated into society, then the creation of art as a separate vocation has divorced the artist from the larger community (16). The artist-novels of the early 20th century strove to portray “the struggle of the artist to overcome [this new found] alienation” to “recapture the former harmony” between artist and society (16). Arising from the artist-novel, the art biopic, such as *Séraphine*, retains the theme of acceptance versus alienation often without re-examining loaded concepts such as “inspired genius,” madness and creativity, primitivism and idealization of the “outsider.”

Above all, art biopics promote the idea that “artists are *different* than ordinary people,” that “artists preserve in their practice something society in general has lost...[that] they are still in touch with unconscious desires and forces...which ‘straight’ society has outlawed or repressed...[that] they...invoke archaic and primitive forms...which rational, scientific society considers

it has transcended” (16). In some respects, it has become fashionable to emphasize the artist’s alienation in the art biopic, even to celebrate it. Indeed, ending such films as *Lust for Life*, *Pollock*, *Camille Claudel*, and *Frida* with the artist’s psychiatric incarceration, drug overdose, or suicide has become something of an act of triumph for directors. In these films, the artist’s inability to fit into mainstream society becomes an affirmation of “outsider” status, an affirmation of “genius.” Walker claims that “the celebration of the artist as rebel, outsider, iconoclast [or] anti-bourgeois” is one solution to “the conflict between artists and society” (17). Though some artists resolve this conflict by catering to their patron or public, forming artistic communities or redefining their art in political terms; it seems that many film directors and screenwriters, who are themselves artists of the mass-media, find solace in “outsider” mythologies (17).

If art biopics indeed celebrate the “outsider,” then those who enjoy them must also share in that celebration, if only on an unconscious level. My own reluctance to deconstruct Provost’s, *Séraphine*, must arise from the understanding that in revealing the construction of Séraphine’s “genius,” I am unraveling my personal mythologies of “genius,” my own need to celebrate the “outsider.” Thus, it becomes less a question of why Martin Provost chooses to portray Séraphine as an “inspired genius” and more of question of why this portrayal pleases me. Through a close reading of those scenes that depict Séraphine’s “genius,” I hope to expose the film for what it is—not a re-enactment of history, but a carefully constructed work of art. By diving beneath the

exquisite surface of *Séraphine*, it becomes possible to question the dangerous vision that lies beneath the film's apparent verisimilitude.

The scenes that depict Séraphine in the process of painting serve to magnify her persona as passionate to the point of obsession, a pre-requisite for the romantic conception of artistic genius. All such scenes share certain qualities in common: the camera captures medium to close-up shots of Séraphine kneeling on the floor beside her outstretched canvas, some which pan her small apartment to reveal a clutter of canvases set haphazardly to dry against walls or furniture; she wears a look of fierce intensity; she paints accompanied by her own singing, fabricated sounds of war or the scratch of her paintbrush against wood or canvas, but never by background music. In *The Dramatic Art of Film*, Alan Casty claims that "background music has...an undeniable power to suggest, heighten and intensify" the emotional impact of a film (Casty 111). Constructing his film for a sophisticated, well-educated audience, Provost chooses to abandon this clichéd appeal to emotion. Allowing the passion of the moment to carry, not through music, but rather through Yolande Moreau's performance, Provost creates a startlingly realistic effect that mimics historical film footage of expressionists such as Jackson Pollock.

It feels, through these scenes, that Séraphine lives in her own world and follows her own music. Creating on the edge of culture, she paints spontaneously and does not require someone else's music to emote for her. Through this silent assertion, Provost

continues to shape Séraphine into the mad genius he requires for his drama. Scenes of spontaneous self-expression implicate Séraphine as a certain type of artist, the kind that creates in fits of inspiration, which no one could possibly imitate or reconstruct. The irony, of course, is that contemporary artists have recreated Séraphine's work for the set and the "spontaneous" act of creation is superbly reenacted by the actress, Yolande Moreau, who won an award for best actress at the French Cesar Awards for her performance. No matter that the film constructs the experience of the self-taught "genius," I want to believe that it is true. Provost's elaborate artifice draws me in and lures me deeper into the narrative. *This must have happened*, I think. *Séraphine was a real artist.*

But I must, here, question my own assumption. Yolande Moreau is not Séraphine Louis, and, in fact, could not possibly know what Séraphine felt or thought as she engaged in her art. Moreau is an actress, not a painter. She is not struggling to survive as domestic laborer, neither has she survived World War I, nor walked barefoot through the streets of 20th century Senlis. The film seeks to represent a first-person perspective of Séraphine that no one, including Wilhelm Uhde, could possibly know or discover, and it does this, not only through specific scenes which recreate the events of Séraphine's life, but also through its extraordinary cinematography. The camera tracks Séraphine as she meanders through a meadow and pauses on her bare feet as she plods through the mud at the edge of a river. It tracks her as she climbs the branches of a tree where she gazes into dappled

sunlight streaming through the canopy above her. It rests on the surface of the water in a pond and, later, in a bath as *Séraphine* lays her open palms against the rippling reflections. By attempting to film the village of Senlis as though the camera sees with *Séraphine*'s eyes, Provost creates a magical world, and again, I want to believe in this magic, I want to pretend that I too have seen the world as an artist. In these quiet moments, the film is utterly convincing in its simplicity. The actual *Séraphine* has surely come this way and seen what I see as I view the film. How could it be otherwise?

In his film review for the *New Republic*, Stanley Kauffmann makes a similar observation of Provost's cinematic style:

Séraphine is Provost's fourth feature, and clearly he wanted to do more than tell the story of her life...He wanted the very texture of the film to amplify the story as it unfolded. With Brunet's cinematography, in which beauty is immediate, and with [Yolande] Moreau's acting, which is an embrace more than a performance, and with its own in-sight and spirit, Provost has made a picture that is almost biblical in its simplicity and its passion. More, he has brought about a paradox: *Séraphine*, like many superior films, is part of the film world yet seems nearly to renounce it. (Kauffmann 34)

Kauffmann notes that the "texture" of the film holds an unexpected allure, "that it amplifies the story as it unfolds." This illusion of texture arises from Provost's unique representation of space and time in those scenes which depict *Séraphine*'s contented solitude. When she is alone, time feels expansive, but space seems to shrink into insect-sized microcosms. As the camera lingers on a handful of yellow mud scooped up from the river with bare hands, the clay seems to ooze between my fingers. At the butcher

shop, when she dips a glass bottle into a bowl of bloody livers, I cringe as if my own hands are wet with blood. In both instances, the process of collection occurs over less than twenty seconds of film time, but feels infinitely longer. Again, the lack of background music affects my experience of the film. Twenty seconds of silence simply *feels* longer than twenty seconds of song. Additionally, the camera zooms into the small area of her cupped palm or the bowl of raw liver for an unnaturally long time, so that it feels that I witness these scenes directly from Séraphine's perspective. The manipulation of time and space in these scenes serves to pull us into Séraphine's perceptions. I perceive the world as full of life, color and texture. I see the way an artist sees. I become the Artist.

Provost continues to utilize the close-up shot in other sections of the film, both to maintain a sense of intimacy with the artist and to magnify her experience of the French countryside. By manipulating time and space, Provost allows the setting to envelop Séraphine, so that I seem to merge both with Séraphine's perspective and the surrounding natural world. The film opens with one such scene which begins as a long-shot that encompasses the sky and the river, but immediately shifts to a close-up of Séraphine's hand rooting through the river mud for some yet unknown object. The identity of the hand is yet to be established, as the film remains in a first-person perspective throughout this initial scene. Her lantern and basket safely on shore, Séraphine wades along the river bank in water deep enough to soak the bottom of her skirt, and the bottom of her skirt is, for the duration

of this shot, all I know of her. The next moment of harvest is not brief or swift, but long and lingering, so that the five to ten seconds of film time required to let the moss slip through her loose fist and snap off at the end appears to take an eternity. And in that moment of eternity I know the texture of the beard-like moss, the softness of water lapping about our ankles, and the smoothness of the dawn gliding across the surface of the water. Again, the world is like a secret—quiet, except for the scattered whispers of wind in the leaves. Silence catches in the moss and holds us captive. In these moments, the film feels less narrative than lyrical, and less lyrical than dream-like. Séraphine becomes not simply an artist, but an other-worldly being.

If Provost is, in part, responsible for shaping Séraphine's biography according to his vision, he shares that responsibility with Wilhelm Uhde, whose memoirs directly influenced the creation of the script. Uhde, who disliked the political implications of the term "naive" as a description of the self-taught or rural artist, would label his five favorite naive artists—including Séraphine and the more well-known artist Henri Rousseau—"the modern primitives" as a result of Rousseau's paintings of jungles and other "exotic" wildlife (Kallir 41). For him, those aspects of Séraphine that he found simple or child-like provided her a unique perception of the world that bordered on "genius." Ironically, all five self-taught painters in question pursued verisimilitude in their artwork, but did not have the skill to achieve a sense of realism (Goldwater 180). Séraphine's paintings, in particular, had a wild, visionary look that reminded art collectors

of the recent trend in modern art towards abstraction—the Fauves and early Cubism. This quality made her work valuable for a time. The obstacles she encountered as a working-class painter, her modesty, her isolation and her affinity for nature all increased her market value as a self-taught artist.

In the modern period, still entrenched in the hegemony of colonialism, artists appropriated the styles, themes and subject matter of tribal peoples with impunity. This indiscriminate “borrowing,” that rarely credited individual artists in Africa, the Americas or the South Pacific for their influence, later extended to include the appropriation of the art of children, the mentally ill, prisoners, and self-taught artists, who were often working-class people from undeveloped areas of industrialized nations. Indeed, Séraphine’s work held the public interest *as a result of* the modern trend toward “primitivism,” as much or more so than for its intrinsic value. In depicting Séraphine as a self-taught genius, Provost is therefore promoting the idealization of the “simple” or “primitive” that arose during the modern period as a result of colonialism.

For modern painters and sculptors, the imitation of Non-European tribal art, folk art and other marginalized art, created on the fringes of European culture, provided these artists with a connection to Europe’s “primal roots,” and such roots seemed more emotionally powerful and spiritually “authentic” than the rationalism of a society governed by scientific principles. “Interest in the ‘primitive’ was a function of the artist’s discontent with aspects of their own culture. [Like genius,] primitivism invariably

encompasses some form of myth of the artist as outsider operating at the periphery of society as observer and judge and it was often employed as a tool to fashion a renewal in art...” (Rhodes 25). By imitating the art of those people who created on the periphery of European culture or completely outside it, early modern artists – especially those who painted during Séraphine’s lifetime – sought to make their own art convey more passion, more poignancy. They were less and less concerned with verisimilitude, and more with emotional expression. Sadly, non-European artists, and other artists on the periphery of European and U.S. culture, who influenced modern art, rarely received credit for their influence or gave permission for other artists to imitate their work.

In one sense, Provost is acknowledging Séraphine as an “outsider” and providing her with a well-earned place in art history. In another sense, he is not acknowledging *her* at all, but the symbol of who he needs her to be. As the film progresses, Provost’s vision of Séraphine expands, so that in the end, he is able to finally release her.

Despite a clear nostalgia for a simpler era in which the ideals of “primitivism” and “genius” had not yet faded, the film *Séraphine* is surprising in its ambivalence. Martin Provost reconstructs Séraphine Louis from the remnants of discarded ideologies in the hopes of recycling her original discovery story in our contemporary era. Yet in the end, he constructs a Séraphine who appears to resist these ideologies. Our symbolic Séraphine refuses to participate, refuses to suffer for her art, and refuses to remain isolated and uncompensated. She quits her job as a

domestic servant and rents a new and bigger flat with her first earnings from the sale of her work. She clears out her cupboards and buys herself a new set of china. For the first time, she stands behind her work and smiles. Lifting herself off the floor, she paints standing up for once – with a paintbrush instead of her fingers. *Forget it. Enough with authenticity, she seems to say. I'm getting a paycheck now.*

In the last part of the film, Martin Provost depicts Séraphine's encroaching psychosis as a series of small acts of rebellion. After years of patience and devotion, she becomes more and more enraged that she cannot find recognition for herself as an artist. Disgusted with her continued poverty, Séraphine becomes impulsive with her money and hostile toward those she once regarded as friends, including her patron Wilhelm Uhde who insists that she must acknowledge her class and social position. How can she expect a change in circumstances after selling a few paintings? Yes, she is difficult, ornery even, but the more she descends into psychosis, the more sane she becomes. Is it not itself a form of insanity to give and give and give of one's energies with no expectation of compensation or even acknowledgement? It is common in the world of outsider art, both historically and in this 21st century, to insist that the most authentic artist is the one who suffers gladly for his art; the one works the most diligently and yet, expects nothing in return. By demanding acknowledgement, Séraphine spits in the face of all ideologies. She is not a symbol, in the end, but an ordinary woman who has become extraordinary through her belief in her capacity to create.

Near the end of the film, *Séraphine* enters the church in Senlis where she often goes to pray and attend mass. A medium shot reveals a statue of the Virgin Mary all in white and then the camera reveals a close-up of *Séraphine* praying. Wide-eyed, arms outstretched, fingers splayed as if she wishes to grab or embrace some intangible force, *Séraphine* implores the statue of the Virgin Mary to hear her prayer. “I am ready,” she says. “I am ready.” She repeats these words again with increasing passion and determination, but the Virgin statue just stands there in her white dress and blue shawl. The film here cuts to the next morning and *Séraphine* is asleep below the altar. The chapel’s caretaker has gone to fetch the priest and, when they arrive before the altar, the caretaker points not at the sleeping *Séraphine*, but at something apparently above her. The camera pans from the artist curled up at the floor of the altar to the statue of the Virgin that is now painted pink. Beside the statue, I see a paintbrush and palette. *Séraphine* has clearly painted the Virgin Mary, but for what reason? Does she recognize the futility of her prayer, the futility of depending on her art to decrease the material and spiritual hardships of her life?

Painting is an act of power for *Séraphine* Louis and therefore the most likely explanation for her defilement of a sacred symbol lies in a need for creative action. Amidst the chaos of a society on the edge of a Great Depression, those who hold the power hold it tightly. An old woman, alone in the world and now too easily tired to support herself through domestic labor, *Séraphine* is among those most vulnerable to shifts in economic

climate. She refuses to be a victim. Self-reliant to a fault, Séraphine believes in her own power. The Virgin Mary who has called her to paint must stand to be painted if she cannot answer Séraphine's entreaty: "I am ready." She is ready to benefit from her work and she cannot go back to where she was before. Again, Séraphine refuses to remain a passive symbol for the benefit of those who might find inspiration in her life or work. Her resistance, however, is not loud or strong enough to change the world. Soon afterward, Séraphine Louis sets down her paintbrush and retreats into the silence of her psychosis.

In the end, the film leaves Séraphine dragging a chair through a meadow to a solitary oak tree, under which she places the chair and sits down. The camera zooms back so that the lush meadow, the tree and the pale sky dominate the screen. I watch as the artist becomes smaller and smaller and the solitary tree remains frozen on the screen, so that the artist, in the end, appears to disappear into the countryside. In this last scene of the film, Séraphine retreats from the viewer's gaze. She tucks her unique perceptions back into herself and we see only her faint outline and the tree itself. The Séraphine we have met in the film, it seems, has never existed. She belongs now, not to Martin Provost, not to me, but to herself.

The film is over; the screen, black. Now, it is my turn to create.

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THE MINARETS OF
WANGEN BEI OLTEN

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A minaret is, for all intents and purposes, much the same as a Catholic Church's bell tower; both serve as a visual cue that identifies itself to the religious community. Both buildings are in fact symbols used as visual surrogates for the religion they belong to. Although they provide much the same religious function, the minaret, unlike the bell tower, is specifically associated with Islam, not Christianity. These

buildings serve as symbols which exceed their physical expression, and a minaret negotiates this way to project an identity. The minaret itself stems from a tradition in which the *muezzin* will call prayer, or perform *adhan*, from an elevated area in a public place.¹ Attached to mosques, minarets have served as a way to summon practicing Muslims to their mandatory prayer, five times a day. Originally used in cities and rural areas where the muezzin could be heard above everyday noise, industrialized areas make it impossible for the call to prayer to be heard without the assistance of a loudspeaker. Yet minarets continue to be built in developed areas because the minaret has all but ceased to be essential for its traditional function, but has now transcended to its current place a religious symbol of Islam.

Far away from the Fertile Crescent, where the traditional minaret is built as tall spires with a spiraling staircase, lies the Swiss municipality of Wangen bei Olten. Located to the East of the Alps, this village is home to a football club, a Nestlé factory, Swiss chalet cottages, and one minaret. This Wangen bei Olten minaret sparked controversy when residents protested its addition to the local Turkish Cultural Association. The protestors took the association to court, asserting a violation of building codes, as an attempt to prevent the construction of its minaret. After taking its case to the Schweizerisches Bundesgericht, the Swiss equivalent of the Federal Supreme Court, the decision prohibiting the minaret was repealed, although controversy stirred up by protestors

¹ According to Jonathan Bloom, the word muezzin comes from the Arabic word mu'adhdhin, or "one who gives the *adhan*."



**Fig. 1. The Wangen bei Olten Skyline on August 7, 2009.
REUTERS/Michael Buholzer**

continued up until the building's completion in the summer of 2009. According to the regional court judge Bret Frey, "the court ruled on [their] conformity to the building codes, not on [their] freedom of religion" (Tagliabue). The village did not allow the assimilation of Islamic culture, but rather allowed the laws of Switzerland to take precedence. The controversy over this construction directly influenced a referendum to the Swiss constitution (ratified in November, 2009,) which banned the

building of minarets. To the villagers of Wangen bei Olten, the building of minarets in Switzerland was the issue and the skyline of their village became the arena in which this controversy played itself out. Central to the issue of this ban is racism against the growing Muslim population in Europe. To prevent the construction of a minaret, a symbol of Islam, the Swiss campaign toyed with this racism based on a European dislike of the “Orient” that has now been internalized. The voters for the referendum, without realizing it, participated in a traditional hegemony of racism set into motion by the symbolic nature of minarets being built; where the Swiss values are seemingly polluted by Islamic ones.

If this is the case, and the Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People’s Party) who brought the minaret ban to a vote for the fall referendum in 2009 wanted to establish the pollution of Swiss Values, their controversial campaign made sure to do so. The addendum established in the ban is one of many measures against Islamification that have taken place throughout Europe. France, home to the largest Muslim population in Europe, has already placed bans on Islamic traditions such as the prohibition of head scarves in public schools in 2004 (Dear). Switzerland is the first European country so far to take action specifically against the minaret. The underlying issue of the ban is the same across Europe; this issue can be seen in a recent Polish protest against a mosque that is presently in construction. The *New York Times* reported a participant saying “such centers are very often sources of radicalization,” while another stated that he did not want his

daughter to be forced to wear a Burqa (Baczynska). While neither of the protestors' statements are supported by any factual data, the protestors clearly associate the Islamic mosque with oppression and violence. This issue reflects the tensions in Europe over the increasing Muslim population and its impact on what Europeans consider the "Western tradition."

But while the SVP's campaign against minarets was localized to Switzerland, its aim was directed towards the larger European fear of wide-scale Islamification. The party's tactic was to "play on deep-rooted fears that Muslim immigration would lead to an erosion of Swiss values" and SVP Leaders were quoted as saying that the referendum "is the beginning of Switzerland's fight against Islamification" (Fisher and Cumming and Erlanger). The supporters of the ban believed that the building of more minarets would then cause the downfall of Swiss culture to an Islamic one. On the surface, the fear of Islamification seems to be the motivation for the referendum, but there is something else at work in this decision.

When the Swiss people were told by party leaders that this ban was intended as part of a "fight against Islamification," they believed they were protecting their country's cultural heritage. This Islamification, or the process in which a society becomes increasingly converted to the practices of Islam, is what these party leaders are most afraid of. With a Muslim population of about four hundred thousand out of 7.6 million total, the Muslims make up 4.3 percent of Switzerland and are the second largest religion (Federal Office of Statistics). The likelihood that

complete Islamification will occur is improbable, and although the party leaders touted as much during the campaign, it is nowhere near an immediate threat. In fact, based on the 2000 Census in Switzerland, the majority of Muslims immigrating to Switzerland came from Yugoslavia and the Balkan Peninsula; meaning that the highest percentage of Islamic immigrants come from areas where Muslims and Christians have coincided for centuries, not from fundamentalist Islamic countries.

Even as the SVP leaders told voters that this ban was a rejection of the minarets as a fight against Islamification; the government officials told the country that the result was no such dismissal. In response to the outcome of the vote, Swiss government officials stated that the result was “not a rejection of the Muslim community, religion or culture” (Cumming and Erlanger). The Justice Minister of Switzerland, Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, even stated the ban “is not a feasible means of countering extremist tendencies” (Cumming and Erlanger). There seems to be discrepancy between the statements made by the SVP and the statements made by the Swiss government. Even though the Swiss people who voted in support of the ban believed that it would afford them some protection against Islamification, the government itself did not believe the ban would not live up to these expectations. The voters were persuaded by the SVP to believe they were protecting their culture, when they were actually infringing on the Islamic culture’s expression in Switzerland. If the actual benefits of the ban cannot support the referendum in a reasonable way, then there must be another explanation of what influenced both the lawmakers and Swiss voters.

Neither the statements of the officials nor those of the party leaders has made a clear connection between the building of minarets and the spread of Islam. It is possible that this rationalization might have come from a deep seated racism against Switzerland's Muslim minority. The scholar Tariq Modood has a response to the European assertion that Muslims cannot be subjugated to racism because they are a religious, not a racial group. Modood, whose work primarily focuses on racism and racial inequality, states that "racism is not simply about biology but can also be directed at culturally and religiously marked groups" (851). This definition is important in distinguishing a new type of racism from the traditional interpretation. Contrary to traditional racism being the prejudice of people that is entirely based on their skin color and ethnic appearance, Modood's definition can be applied to any distinct group that is distinguished by either appearance or religion.

If an interpretation of Modood's classification that prejudice against Muslims is racism can be accepted as different than prejudice of ethnicity, the fear motivating the attacks on minarets must be based in that racism towards Muslims and Islamic culture. Since the culture clash between Christianity and Islam is nothing new, this prejudice might arise somewhere in the history of European civilization. In the introduction to *Orientalism*, his famous work on the cultural relationship between East and West, Edward Said defines what he calls "Orientalism" as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). Said claims that during the

Imperialistic period, Europe developed a strategic power-based relationship with their Eastern colonies.

Although many Americans perceive the Orient to mean the areas of Asia such as China, Japan, and Korea, the term originally referred to the regions immediately east of Europe and the subsequent eastern colonies in the Middle East and India (Said 4). Orientalism is the way that the Europeans represented their neighbors to the east as an exotic “Other.” By the separation of the two cultures, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself up against the Orient” (Said 3). The Europeans considered their culture to be civilized, based on Christian traditions, while they considered the Orient to be a land without the same sophistication.

Europeans based their understanding of the Orient in a context they created to understand it. Said describes a complex hegemonic relationship between the Occident and the Orient present in Europe even today. This hegemony is a power relationship in which the Occident takes precedence over the Orient. Said implies that while the domination is no longer physical as it was in the 18th and 19th centuries during European Imperialism, it is still present in the thoughts and actions of the European people. This domination, through soft power, is no longer tied to the government, but has now been internalized by the European population. The relationship that began as a part of imperialism gradually became part of the European culture without any conscious design. In Said’s view, Orientalism was created to understand the culture of the Orient, as a radical

element, in relation to the dominant ideology. Like in cultural hegemonies, the radical element has now become integrated into the beliefs of the Europeans.

Europeans may not outwardly believe that a steeple is better than a minaret, but rather they have internalized a cultural understanding that the Orient is inferior and has no place in their Occidental homeland. This hegemony, as well as their history of dominating the Orient, gives Europeans the idea that their culture is more important, more civilized and thus more powerful than the Orient's. As tradition dictates in Europe, there cannot be room for assimilation of the Orient in the Occident, and there is no way that the symbols of the Orient can be given equivalent significance. Concessions to allow the implementation of Islamic symbols are impossible because they interfere with the superiority of the Occident. The building of minarets and the presence of their immediate symbolic importance to Islam cannot take place in Switzerland, or Europe for that matter, where this is directly opposed to the dominant hegemony.

“The minaret is only the first step,” said the leader of an ultra-conservative Christian party in Switzerland. This “slippery slope” mentality that minarets lead to Sharia Law is depicted in the rhetoric used by these officials to motivate voters, but it also helps reveal their intentions. If the SVP's aim was truly to stop Islamification in Switzerland, its leaders might have also tried to stop an individual's expression of faith, such as banning headscarves in public places. However, these officials are responding to the building of minarets in their homeland. The

rural area in which Wangen bei Olten is located is very picturesque. Its small population of five thousand live and work in an area nestled into the foothills of the Alps and it is peppered with lush green trees and Tudor-style houses. This village has a rich history dating back to the 13th century. When the members of the Turkish Cultural Association decided to build their minaret as an expression of their faith, they unintentionally challenged almost a millennium of Swiss tradition. The villagers' response to the minaret's construction runs deeper than just an issue of racism and the fear of terrorism. In order to protect their power relation, the public opposes any invasion of Oriental culture. By bringing their tradition to the Swiss village of Wangen bei Olten, the Muslims in the Turkish Cultural Association were announcing their presence within Swiss culture. This "invasion" was seen by the villagers as the Orient's infiltration of the Occident through the minarets desecration of the village's skyline. The iconic Alpine town was, to the protestors and government officials, in jeopardy of losing its heritage to the fantastic "other." These minarets seemed only the first step in the degradation of the culture.

The campaign for the referendum was based in feelings shared across Switzerland; that the minarets are a symbol of a larger cultural invasion. In fact, according to Ulrich Schuler a leader of anti-minaret campaign, the minarets are "a symbol against integration" (Fisher). This statement stands out in the controversy and betrays the speaker's feelings towards a growing Muslim population. By practicing their religion freely, Muslims are embodying one of the most important Swiss traditions as a

country with a “reputation for religious tolerance” (Cumming and Erlanger). In order to express their religion, the Muslims will embody their Islamic culture, by building mosques and minarets the traditional way. But by including their own history in the rich history of Switzerland, they are attempting to integrate their Swiss-ness with their Islamic culture. However, by declaring that it is a “symbol against integration” the SVP have now defined “integration” as an abandonment of one culture for another. Yet,



Fig. 2. SVP Anti-Minaret Advertising

when Schuler declares that the minarets are a symbol, it establishes that the SVP is aware of the symbolic nature of the minaret and attempts to use it to its advantage. Instead of denouncing the importance of the structure to Islam, they embrace

its status and attempt to change its meaning. In one of the posters used to advertise the anti-minaret campaign, the image presents a straightforward depiction of a woman in a chandor looking directly at the viewer. Behind her, a field of black minarets resembling missiles litters the Swiss flag. The bold statement 'Stopp. Ja zum Minrett-verbot,' or, 'Stop. Yes on the minaret ban.' It can be seen from this one illustration how the symbolic nature of the minaret was distorted. As a symbol for Islam, the minaret became something entirely different to the people who wished Islamification to be perceived as a contamination of Switzerland.

The quaint village of Wangen bei Olten, with its chalet houses and rich history, lends itself to an extreme pride. Their nationalism is represented through traditional architecture. To the Swiss who supported the referendum, they see the building of something symbolically from the Orient as garish, destroying their rich history. These minarets are then viewed as a pollution of Swiss culture in comparison to the beautiful and scenic buildings they are accustomed to. The Schweizerische Volkspartei leaders were preventing the assimilation of Islamic culture by means of the ban on minarets in Switzerland. But this refusal to accept the minarets in their country now defines the Swiss people. Because minarets are pollutants, a perversion of tradition tied to symbolic nature of the structure as a representation of Islam, they are no longer allowed to make an appearance in the skylines of Swiss villages and towns. As a toxic waste, the rich Islamic tradition associated with minarets is abandoned, cast off, and thrown away by the Occident. No matter how the Swiss who

supported the referendum may see this as protecting their homeland, they are really just making symbolic and hegemonic decision about what they consider beautiful and what they consider trash.

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Mentor: Anna Kovolchuk

THE HYPER-FEMALE

GROTESQUE BODIES IN AMERICAN REALTY TELEVISION

They demand to be watched. They demand to be adored. The women of reality television call and scream from within the enclosed cages of our television sets; their cacophony of cries cannot, and will not, be ignored. The women stand amongst television circuits and conduits, little Thumbelina miniatures, all waiting for a possible opportunity for celebrity and fame. As the television set awakens from its slumber, an eruption of

excitement and frenzy begins as all clamor over one another in an attempt to entertain at the forefront of the screen. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are willing participants in the entertainment-driven, media-saturated world of the 21st century.

The proliferation of reality television is a fairly recent and unexpectedly successful phenomenon, spanning throughout the 1990s and 2000s with shows such as *The Real World* in 1992 and the second season of *The Celebrity Apprentice* premiering in 2009. Try as one might to ignore the “trashiest of the trashy” reality TV shows, the pervasive nature of such programming makes it next to impossible to avoid unless one has lived without a television or an internet connection for the last ten years. In an age of strong online subcultures and mini-communities based on entertainment media, such as Facebook fan pages and message boards, the characters and personalities spawned by such shows makes it that much more difficult to ignore. The rich online culture has caused reality TV’s fame to skyrocket; leading to more engaging and all the more encompassing material for the legions of viewers. While not considered to be the first example of reality TV worldwide, *The Real World* in the United States holds the title of being one of the first shows to introduce many of the prevalent stereotypes, themes and identity roles that we have come to associate with reality television show characters.

In particular, the identity roles and values exhibited by the women of reality TV are worthy of careful study because of their simultaneous disassociation *and* association with female stereotypes. In reaffirming the status quo and the patriarchal nature

of American society, the women of reality TV do exhibit some characteristics representative of the classic female dichotomies seen throughout cinematic roles, soap operas and advertising, such as: sexual and pure, submissive and dominant, and aggressive yet nurturing. What disassociates the women of reality TV from their television and cinematic counterparts is the complete commodification and hyper-sexualization of these women as one-dimensional creatures. They are constructed as having exaggerated physical and personality traits typically associated with Western ideals of femaleness (attractiveness, passivity, dependence, sexual purity and emotional instability) that defines them as human beings. This exaggeration charts the murky waters known as the “grotesque.”

Before comparing the women of reality television to the grotesque, it is necessary for the term to be defined by two different theorists, Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser. According to Mikhail Bakhtin in his text, *Rabelais and His World*, “[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style” (Bakhtin 303). Wolfgang Kayser in his text *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, holds a far different definition of the grotesque. John Guzlowski, comparing Kayser and Bakhtin, claims that Kayser’s version of the grotesque reflects the “estranged world” and that “the grotesque is a structure containing elements of the unexpected that transform our usual encounters with the world into a ‘strange and ominous’ experience” (Guzlowski 1). Guzlowski also theorizes that Kayser’s version reflects the grotesque as having a

“renewing” and positive structure, not unlike the folk humor of ages past. In his analysis of Bakhtin, Guzlowski states that “[m]uch of the grotesque imagery that surrounds the carnival and consecrates its ‘Inventive Freedom’ derives from what Bakhtin calls the ‘essential principle of grotesque realism’: Degradation” (Guzlowski 2). This degradation to which Bakhtin speaks refers to the purposeful rendering of everything that is “high and spiritual” to the level of the body, or material. In *Rabelais and His World*, the example of “the clown” is used often, in that this figure was as a way by which to relegate the levels of authority of those in positions of high power, such as the rule of monarchy, to all that is earthly and bodily.

Elements of both Bakhtin and Kayser’s grotesque theory can certainly be applied to the women of reality television. In keeping with Bakhtin’s grotesque as containing elements of “exaggeration and excessiveness,” these characteristics describe the hyper-female of reality TV. She is all that is excessive, overtly sexual, and in general, encompasses the state of exaggerated femaleness. However, this exaggerated state of femaleness does not extend to personality only; the Western cultural trend towards a Barbie-like plastic perfection has produced a desire for extensive body modification in both women and men. The plastic surgery industry gleans ongoing massive revenues from the thousands of breast augmentations, Botox injections, and other forms of invasive and non-invasive surgery performed each year. These modifications function as grotesque masks, which corresponds to Kayser’s theory. The plastic people we view on our screens

live and operate in a world that appears “estranged” and surreal to the average viewer; this world is a place where societal laws rarely apply.

The Bad Girls Club, a reality TV non-dating show, involves a group of self-proclaimed “Bad Girls” living together in a house while following their journey through four months of failed personal relationships, “cat fights” and copious amounts of alcohol. This show exhibits the extreme characteristics of Bakhtin’s grotesque theory; the women revel in the attention placed upon negative-attention seeking behaviors, such as drinking to excess, partying, casual sex, physical and emotional abuse from and of other cast members, and mistreatment by members of the opposite sex. Scenes in the show such as these convey that the women on the screen no longer live in the realm of reality, but have transitioned to an altered, “hyper-state” that revolves around one defining characteristic: the grotesque.

It is possible to assess important information about a text from its opening sequence. The title sequence of *The Bad Girls Club* begins with all cast members, usually seven, represented as one Caucasian, abnormally-skinny, anatomically disfigured paper doll. The doll has rigid, robot-like body movements and dances disjointedly to the theme music. A black censor covers her eyes. During the seventeen second montage, the paper doll commits various acts such as: drinking a cocktail, smoking (exhaling out of its nose), standing amongst red flames, wielding a hairdryer like a weapon, sitting complacently in jail, and riding a devil-horned jeep chaotically throughout the streets. The identities of

these women have been reduced to a mere object (a paper doll, at that), with no sense of self (hence, the censor over the eyes). Not only is the image of the “Bad Girl” being effectively branded during this opening montage, but we are dealing with the added problem of how femaleness is being conveyed in this program. A girl or young woman is being shown that the “Bad Girl” is the girl to be, and no alternative exists.

In one memorable episode of *The Bad Girls Club*, entitled “Prank Wars Part 1: Party Girls Strike Back” (originally aired in 2008), four girls in the house decide to urinate in various food products located in the kitchen shared by all the women, as well as on sponges and in various cleaning products. Unbeknownst to the other women, the food is then consumed and the cleaning products are used. This act of biological warfare can only be seen as a direct comparison to Bakhtin and Kayser’s grotesque, as well as containing elements of the carnivalesque.

The carnivalesque, as argued by Bakhtin, speaks to a need of society to rebel and let loose in a similar fashion to the carnival spirit of years past. “During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all take part” (Bakhtin 7). Bakhtin also describes these festivities in depth, highlighting the unity felt by all as part of the social celebration, and what is meant for the participants and observers of such celebrations. A strengthened sense of unity and camaraderie surely took place between the girls involved in the kitchen “prank”; all were giggling and high-

fiving during the ordeal and reminisced fondly about it for days afterward. It had brought them closer as friends, and as enemies (in *The Bad Girls Club*, housemates never stay friends for long). More examples of the women's "carnavalesque nature" include the many sequences of "clubbing," drinking and dancing, and the inevitable casual sex encounters that occur as a result of partying. The women unabashedly "let loose," and partake in appetites of the flesh for the camera to record and broadcast. Could it be said that the actions by the women of reality television speak to a need of society to vicariously take part in "trashy" and carnivalesque behaviors once embraced in ages past but now thought of as taboo? Has the word "carnavalesque" been thus replaced by that of "trashy" to express a similar concept in a new era? While not disregarding the use of reality television as a way to further subjugate women, it can be said that the women of reality television exist in their hyper-state merely to function as anti-female role models for society.

The separation of spectator and spectacle is an important distinction in Bakhtin's text. This separation acts as a detriment to the celebrative and socially freeing aspects of carnival spirit, creating a barrier between the spectator and spectacle in a way that causes judgment and scorn for "the other." For those participants involved in carnivalesque celebrations, the carnival is a place in which anarchy reigns through festivities celebrating the grotesque and the exaggerated human form. The end result is of a "world turned upside down," where jesters become kings, and heaven becomes hell. For those in the role of spectator,

grotesque celebrations take on a different meaning entirely. As Bakhtin describes in his text, the conservatism of the carnival is a way by which to reinforce acceptable behavior during non-celebratory life. It could be said that the women of reality television speak to this exact conservatism. We sit in judgment of the women's actions as expressed on our screens, and shudder to think of our daughter, our wife, or our sister acting in a similar manner. An instant separation is created between "us" and "them"; a separation completely unrelated to the intangibility and otherworldliness of the camera and nature of celebrity. This in turn reinforces the importance of social rule and hierarchy, as well as the need to create anti-models for younger women.

In addition to relating the concepts of the grotesque and the carnivalesque to *The Bad Girls Club* and other reality TV show programming, it is worth noting that humiliation plays a central role in reality TV shows as a way to further reinforce traditional views of gender and power. This directly relates back to Bakhtin's central principle of "degradation" and the carnival as a way to reinforce conservatism. Myra Mendible, in her article "Humiliation, Subjectivity and Reality TV" discusses this phenomenon, while relating humiliation to Bakhtinian theory of societal hierarchy and order.

The "reality" in these shows stems not from their lack of a script or professional actors [...] but from the ways it reflects the underlying logic of our social order. A closer analysis of the concept of humiliation is crucial not only in evaluating RTV as feminist fairy tale or nightmare but in understanding humiliation as a central mechanism within modern social hierarchies. (336)

Thus, the humiliation of these “Bad Girls” (or in countless other reality TV programming, most notably dating shows where multiple women vie for the attention of one man), acts as yet another tool by which to reinforce Bakhtinian conservatism and support the current systems of gender, racial and power roles. While a liberating aspect of the carnivalesque, the humiliation of women in reality television is ultimately used as a disciplinary and cautionary tool.

It is important to note that the excessive and grotesque quality of the reality TV show woman is not bound by race or class. Shows such as *I Love New York* and *Flavor of Love* act as a conduit for all of the once thought “forgotten” stereotypes of African-American men and women. Tiffany Pollard (or better known by the name Flavor Flav created for her, “New York”) began her reality TV career on the show *Flavor of Love* on VH1, and then went on to become the host of her own dating show after a failed relationship with Flavor Flav. New York perfectly exemplifies the stereotype of the “Jezebel Woman.” She is lewd, loud, sexual, tempting and beguiling. The racial stereotypes of the not-too-distant past have either returned with a vengeance or have evolved into something all the more harmful.

One must factor in the level of agency that exists for women such as Tiffany Pollard who occupy the space of reality television and thus the state of exaggerated womanhood. If Pollard was not aware of what was expected of her on the first season of *Flavor of Love*, she certainly understood the requirements needed to gain viewership for her own dating show. Unsurprisingly, Tiffany

Pollard's debut into her own reality television show sphere was accompanied by an alarmingly large set of breast implants and all the more absurd, rambunctious behavior and personality traits. It appears as if she willingly applied the various grotesque masks needed to gain network ratings. As Pollard's venture into reality TV explicitly expresses, the term "reality" in "reality television" is a misnomer. Characteristics of oneself are heightened to become marketable to the masses, and not unlike grotesque caricatures, created with the intent of exaggerating a physical or personality trait to the absurd. The women of reality television quickly discover what works and how to best capitalize on what is deemed as "entertaining." The spectators of such shows and Hollywood "commentators" anxiously sit in the shadows, waiting to expel venomous judgment and harsh criticism.

In addition to the strong sense of judgment emanating from those who observe these carnivalesque behaviors, the characters created by reality television also speak to our need to play out competitive and revengeful roles. As Myra Mendible argues, "A study conducted for *Psychology Today* found that RTV viewers place a very high value on both revenge and competition; most prominent among the attitudes expressed by fans surveyed, however, is their desire for prestige and status" (Mendible 4). The best example of such humiliation, as discussed by Mendible, can be seen through *The Bad Girls Club* "reunion shows," where cast members reunite after filming has ended to discuss footage of the show, their relationships, and to reflect upon their experiences.

The participatory nature of these reunion shows further relates to Bakhtin's "spectator and spectacle" aspect of the carnivalesque. Rowdy audience members scream, yell, whistle and cat-call at the fights that erupt on the stage. Not only are individuals watching the show from within the comfort of their own home, but they have the added experience of watching members of *another* audience take part in the show as well. This adds to the sense of community and unity felt between all viewing audiences; a sense of unity built around the separation of spectator and spectacle and stemming from the overwhelming judgment felt towards the women who share the stage. The reunion shows perfectly exemplify the backlash of the carnivalesque and the reinforcement of societal order when the separation between both parties is successfully achieved.

The reunion show stage can be seen as an arena, or a place in which physically fighting and emotional abuse is acceptable and even expected (on the actual show, physical fighting would result in disqualification). The women act uncontrollably and wildly and are incapable of making appropriate decisions. Therefore, their spectacles of inappropriateness and exaggerated womanhood must be punished. Perez Hilton, celebrity blogger and gay icon, hosted the recent *Bad Girls Club 2010* reunion show. While his hosting duties including asking questions and dishing out relationship advice, he acted mainly as the referee, helping to stop altercations that arose on stage. Armed with a toy squirt gun filled with water, Perez took the liberty of splashing the women of the show with water in the face and body when things

got too heated. When a woman spit in another woman's face, Perez doused her with the squirt gun immediately, forcing her to return to her seat. In this instance, the squirt gun has become an extension of the male phallus (used to punish "bad" female behavior by means of ejaculation), as well as an obvious symbolic representation of power and law. Societal law has reasserted itself in this situation, as the audience gains a certain amount of pleasure and positive reinforcement from viewing the humiliation and degradation of the women while in the arena-sphere. Further layers of the carnivalesque and grotesque begin unraveling when factoring in the exact role Perez Hilton occupies during the fiasco.

Perez Hilton, known for his online blog where he virtually humiliates celebrities and Hollywood fame culture, has entered into a position of great power that he rarely experiences in the real world. While Perez's job on the reunion show did include "Bad Girl" humiliation (it could be said that he is an "expert" in this field), he experiences a backlash in the real world with many celebrities regarding his website and profession as demeaning and amoral. The Fool has thus become the King, as Hilton himself has stepped into a position of great power and authority for an allotted period of time. The liberating, carnivalesque aspects of this are clearly seen, as a mockery has been made of the establishment of power. You know you are in trouble when a new sheriff is in town, and that new sheriff is Perez Hilton.

Danielle Stern, in her article, "MTV, Reality Television and the Commodification of Female Sexuality in The Real World"

describes the exploitive nature of reality TV shows and the possible reasons behind broadcasting such programs.

[...] reality television executives, like television executives of other genres, are faced with economic pressures to produce programs suited to pleasing advertisers. In turn, this leads to exploitive reality programming that serves commercial interests above all [...] females are bearing the brunt of sexual exploitation via television representations that reinforce traditional views of gender and power. (Stern 1)

These traditional views of gender and power include the subjugation and control of women through commodification, sexualization and female punishment, as seen specifically in *The Bad Girls Club* reunion show (i.e. Perez Hilton with the water gun). This reinforcement Stern theorizes rings true in a Bakhtinian sense, as well. In directly relating this quote to Bakhtinian conservatism, the carnivalesque acts as a disciplinary and cautionary measure to those who step too far outside of society's boundary lines. Naturally, this reinforces traditional views of how not only women should behave in the public and private spheres, but how others should react to the "loose" women portrayed on our screens.

Grotesqueness is only but one lens available for use in the framing of an analysis through media literacy. Whether the women of reality TV speak to a basic human need to vicariously partake in behaviors of the carnivalesque, or a tool in which to further continue the cycle of female subjugation, it is important to realize that the carnivalesque performs dual functions in our society. These functions, while contradictory, are part of the simultaneous

celebration and denial of modern life's pleasures. Reality television functions as a type of Bakhtinian social celebration, but more importantly, it functions as a disciplinary tool. We watch the women of reality television as they are made examples of; gawk at the size of the fake cleavage we observe, and estimate the large quantities of Botox required to make lips look so unnaturally engorged. For those observing the spectacle, (the audience), the level of dislike and the lack of comfort rises as we watch the women who entertain us, and only the reinforcement of socially acceptable behavior remains.

It is certainly easy for the average viewer of reality TV to become negligent in recognizing the constructions of the female image on his or her television screen. It is also easy to allow these constructions to unknowingly filter into our consciousnesses and alter the ways in which we view and interact with the world. What is not so simple is finding ways to challenge the distorted constructions of femaleness and maleness in our reality TV show programming and the various forms of entertainment-media around us. These images are knowingly constructed by powerful television executives and network producers, who know what people want to watch and how to garner the highest ratings on their television network. Like the women of popular MTV music videos, the women of reality television are mere vessels for advertising, their grotesqueness a lens in which to further view their subjugation. This problem is only complicated when referring once again to the agency of these women and their complicity in the subjugation.

Using Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque and grotesque, we can more clearly identify not only the roles these participants play in the dramas of reality television, but what role the spectator fulfills in the creation and sanctioning of the carnival. A complicated dance is performed by all involved in the carnival celebration, and the level of agency the women on the screen and the audience possess cannot be underestimated. By viewing reality television with Bakhtinian theories in mind, we become better able to deconstruct the messages conveyed in the television shows we watch, and as a result, are enlightened as to what purpose they serve in society. The women of reality television may demand to be watched and demand to be adored, but Western culture will have to wrestle with these constructions as medias continue to change, and the world of televisuality continues to evolve.

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REBECCA LUSK

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Mentor: Drew Beard

WHITE-TRASHING THE "WHODUNIT"

REPRESENTATIONS OF WHITE TRASH IN THE CRIME
NOVELS OF CARL HIAASEN

Rednecks. Hillbillies. Hicks. Trailer Trash. Regardless of the terminology, each title resides within the nomenclature known as "White Trash." Yet white trash is more than just a title; it is a lifestyle marked in popular culture by poor education, abject poverty, and more often than not a "twangy" Southern accent. In America, terming something as "white trash" instills the belief

that this person or item is somehow lacking, and in turn provides a way of ranking white Americans within their own race. In *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, Matt Wray claims that this term is important to national identity in that it “helps solidify for the middle and upper classes a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority” while creating a scapegoat for white American blame within the framework of “whiteness” (4). Through a historical and textual approach, I will differentiate between the socially acceptable forms of white trash and pejorative white trash through an exploration of select crime novels of Carl Hiassen, and how these forms impact the actions and fates of his characters.

Florida novelist Carl Hiassen celebrates white trash America in his crime novels, where the protagonist is just as likely as the perpetrator to fall into this category of “white trash.” It is important to note the significance of the crime genre as the basis for Hiassen’s exploration in that crime novels have generally been associated with an educated, white upper class. His choice of the “whodunit” plays upon stereotypical guidelines in which the protagonist is an eccentric, often semi-professional or amateur detective. Hiassen certainly uses these set character roles in his novels when creating his heroes as well as his villains. These white trash representations manifest as crooked politicians, scheming religious fanatics, white supremacists, and disgruntled newspaper journalists out for some kind of glory or infamy. Although the “whodunit” gained popularity during the 1920s and 1930s with the rise of English crime novels as the staple for both historical and contemporary crime fiction, Hiassen strays from

the distinctly European class structures associated with the crime genre. His white trash characterizations mock the traditional English country home setting, placing his crimes on the border of high rise condominiums and shanty towns. His novels show that wealth and class may remain a prominent aspect of the “whodunit”, but certainly not in the same fashion as his European predecessors. For Hiaasen race and class do more than just situate his novels, they define his works within a warped framework of whiteness. His intent focus on the lowly, the “trashy”, and the morally corrupt separate his works from the European prototypes of Agatha Christie or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He seeks to explore both the positive and negative outcomes of a fictional world rooted in truth surrounding the American white class structure. As a Florida native, Hiaasen is all too familiar with the impact that representations of white trash Americans has left on the Sunshine State. In a CBS interview Hiaasen describes Florida as, “a paradise of scandals teeming with drifters, deadbeats, and misfits drawn here by some dark primordial calling like demented trout. And you’d be surprised how many of them decide to run for public office”(Rebecca Leung). Because the options for corruption are so rampant in Hiaasen’s Florida, it has become in his fiction a hub of crime and half-brained schemes, often executed by the whitest of trash in an effort to get rich quick without an honest day’s work.

Yet, Hiaasen’s “whodunits” do not serve the purpose of reiterating the cultural difference between rich white Americans and poor white Americans through his clearly “trashy” characters.

Instead, his novels distinguish between the white trash we love and the white trash we love to hate. Although the protagonist and antagonists may fall together into the classification of white trash, Hiaasen successfully differentiates between “good” and “bad” characters through their actions, motivations, and world views. His novels are primarily concerned with ecological issues in the Florida Keys, and the corporations or corrupt individuals out to destroy these wetlands. It is for this reason that critics have adopted the phrase “environmental thrillers” as a means of categorizing the unique approach to crime and nature in Hiaasen’s novels. A character’s relationship to the natural world becomes the primary means of separating the protagonists from the antagonists, for in Hiaasen’s work, being “white trash” alone is not enough to separate the two into camps of good and evil.

In his introduction to *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, Matt Wray introduces the concept of “white trash” by beginning with a brief historical account of the term. He claims that the earliest recorded use of the term white trash dates back to the early part of the nineteenth century. Wray attributes the origin to black slaves who used it as a derogative reference to Caucasian Americans working as (often unpaid) servants to privileged white landholders. In the context of black slavery and white servitude, the manifestation of white trash alludes to the fundamentally racialized foundation of the term. Americans have now nationally recognized the violent injustice of black slavery and attempted to make amends. African American heritage is celebrated through national holidays and historical

education months. Yet the group termed white trash receives nothing but disdain from their fair-skinned brothers. In his memoir, *The Redneck Manifesto*, Jim Goad gives a firsthand account of the abjection of poor white Americans. He claims that “being white trash in America is perceived to be a personal attitude rather than a socioeconomic situation”, in short, white trash is a choice rather than a predicament (Goad 38). This inner-race racism between white Americans remains ignored and invisible to the public eye because it is perceived that to “be white” means to reside within the middle class and anyone who falls below that does so of their own choice. This abjection of whites by whites creates a new type of racism that Hiaasen’s novels bring to the forefront.

This concept of “choice” has evolved into contemporary stereotypes depicting rural poor whites as lazy, alcoholic, conniving, incestuous, and sexually perverse individuals and is constantly expanding in its accusations. The stigma has grown such that one “Dr. Verne Edstrom, Esq.” felt compelled to compose an entire satirical text on trailer park manners and how to live as a proper redneck in *White Trash Etiquette*. Edstrom begins his parody with a chapter titled “How to Know if You’re Decent Trash,” complete with a multiple choice screening exam. His book covers every topic necessary to blend into blue-collar America, from what sport is good and what sport “is for guys named Chauncey” to gambling tips and simple steps to connive a payday advance (144). In essence, the term white trash currently serves as a reference point for stereotyping what is and what is

not appropriate demeanor for whites in America while creating discourse about cultural identities and social power. In constructing this racial hierarchy, white Americans have created a dichotomy within their own racial identity. Wray states that white trash assists in providing a new juncture between race and class in America in that, “[white trash] becomes a term which names what seems unnamable: a race (white) which is used to code ‘wealth’ is coupled with an insult (trash) which means, in this instance, economic waste” (8). In his memoir, *Sunset Trailer Park*, Allan Berube documents this division between wealth, class, and the “white trash” stereotype. Growing up in a trailer park with middle-class parents in the 1950s presents a different outlook on what is commonly viewed as white trash. Berube describes the way his family defended themselves against prejudice and stereotyping by enforcing a higher standard of living to discourage the beliefs that just because their home was a double-wide meant they were lacking in class or respectability. Berube states, “Trashy white people lived somewhere else- probably in other trailer parks. We could criticize and look down on them, yet without them we would have been the white people on the bottom” (21). This brief manifesto furthers the importance of whiteness and the desire to categorize within one’s own race.

In his crime novels, Carl Hiaasen seems to take this concept of racial hierarchy and the seemingly inseparable union of wealth and class and adds a whole new spin to it. No longer are the “trashiest” characters necessarily the poorest or most mentally unstable. For Hiaasen, being white trash is more than just a way of pigeonholing white Americans within their own race; it is a

way of life, a symbol of personal identity. In Hiaasen's reality, a person's character is determined through his or her relationship to the environment. Wealth, class, or levels of whiteness have no place in his desire to preserve or destroy Florida's natural beauty. The trashiest characters are alike in their ignorance and disrespect towards nature (not to undermine their many macabre quirks and habits). Hiaasen uses the many contemporary white trash stereotypes to his advantage, embellishing the outlandish qualities and downfalls projected upon white trash America, essentially creating the white trash hero. This character uses his wit, eccentricity, and dumb luck to get the girl, preserve the dwindling wilderness, and ultimately save the day.

Hiaasen's first novel, *Tourist Season* (1985), is his initial attempt at conveying his own personal vendetta against the boom and bustle of Americans flocking by the busload daily to Florida to get a taste of the Sunshine State. *Tourist Season* begins with the discovery of a well-known (albeit corrupt) Florida politician dead in a suitcase with a rubber alligator lodged in his larynx and a vague note left by the newest Florida terrorist organization, "Las Noches de Diciembre," whose only desire is to rid Florida of tourism once and for all. The death of the City Commissioner was just the beginning of rebel newspaper-columnist-turned-radical Skip Wiley's reign of terror. Wiley's passionate environmentalism combined with erratic behavior creates a new type of antagonist only Hiaasen could conjure, and the reader is left to wonder whether the deaths of innocent tourists are actually justified.

Characters like Bode and Chub, who represent Hiaasen's disdain towards the stereotypical white trash right-wingers driven by corruption, greed, and sheer stupidity, appear time and again in numerous forms throughout each of his novels. In *Skinny Dip* (2004), it is Chaz Perrone, a corrupt yellow-Hummer-driving biologist who earns his living faking phosphorus testing in the Everglades paired up with Edward "Tool" O'Toole, a hairy bodyguard hooked on Fentanyl patches lifted literally off the backs of sleeping hospice patients. In *Basket Case* (2002), investigative reporter turned obituary writer Jack Tagger is hot on the trail of widowed pop star Cleo Rio (famous for flashing her pubes on MTV) who he believes to have killed her rock star turned environmentalist husband for nothing more than a hit song. Hiaasen ensures that even the most cunning of his white trash, greed driven villains get their just desserts in the end. Be it gobbled up by a hungry Seminole crocodile (amicably called "Pavlov") or left for the carrion with the popular "Club" steering wheel anti-theft device thoroughly attached to one's lower mandible, Hiaasen ensures that the morally corrupt and ecologically apathetic die gloriously horrific deaths.

In his second novel, *Stormy Weather* (1995), the beautiful but corrupt Edie Marsh puts her dreams of a six-figure settlement for seducing a Kennedy aside for a shot at insurance fraud in the wake of Hurricane Andrew. Joined by Snapper, a misogynistic brute with an unmistakably mangled jaw, and Tony Torres, the nefarious mobile-home salesman of the year, Edie watches as her aspirations of wealth and glamour disintegrate at the hands of

one of Hiaasen's only reappearing characters; Clinton Tyree, the once-governor of Florida turned swamp rat.

For Hiaasen, Clinton Tyree (known by most as Skink or "Captain") exemplifies his concept of "good" white trash. Governor in the 1970s, Tyree had all the characteristics necessary for a Florida politician – born and raised in the Sunshine State, a dazzling smile, and a college football legacy. Yet, his disdain for urban development and refusal of bribery set him apart from all other politicians of the past or present. Known for his passionate public speeches discouraging sprawl and tourism, Tyree quickly lost his amicable following and became more of a liability than a god-send. Unable to tolerate the degeneration of his homestate, Governor Tyree snapped one day and disappeared into the swampland, resurfacing only to dine on road-kill or teach some wasteful tourist a lesson or two about ecological decency. Often observed well-tanned and shirtless wearing camouflage slacks and a floral print shower cap while bearing a glass eye, Skink is unmistakable in his many cameo appearances throughout Hiaasen's novels, frequently spotted in an orange poncho dashing across highway lanes to gather his supper of opossum or rattlesnake. His perfect orthodontia is the only clue to his former identity standing in stark contrast to his grizzly beard and long wild hair, littered with twigs. Aside from an affinity for smoking toad urine (which he claims to be a powerful hallucinogen), the former governor is still mentally sane and sound in his beliefs about humankind's moral duty to uphold nature. Skink's love for nature (as well as classic rock 'n roll) mirror Hiaasen's own

worldviews. His nomadic lifestyle reveals Hiaasen's ultimate hope: that tourists will discontinue their endless trek to Florida, that Disney World will become a ghost town, and those left standing will be forced to live off the land, allowing the natural world to thrive undisturbed by the American Dream.

Hiaasen's novels redefine contemporary stereotypes of white trash. For Hiaasen, white trash is not a means of degrading people within their own race, but the very foundation of the state of Florida. Matt Wray calls for whites to "reevaluate themselves and their identities self-consciously, eschewing a vision of whiteness as the norm for a more realistic and fair-minded understanding of whiteness as a specific, racially marked group existing in relation to many other such groups" (5). Hiaasen does not focus on understanding why these conditions exist within the social hierarchy; his main focus is upon the ways in which these individuals act out their impulses, urges, and desires and whether or not they reflect a positive ecological outlook on the world outside of trailer parks and shantytowns. Hiaasen exposes these forms of whiteness that are set apart from the rest of white Americans. True to form, he does represent his white trash characters as marginalized in one way or another, and it is through this marginalization that his "good" trash and "bad" trash collide with and confront one another. Wray states that this marginalization of white trash Americans reminds us that far too often, "admission into the multicultural order depends upon one's ability to claim social victimization," which Hiaasen literarily scoffs at (4). Wray does not mean to say that one is fortunate to be

born black instead of white, merely that for a racial group to claim minority status (as white trash Americans undeniably do) one must experience a certain degree of prejudice. For white trash Americans, this denial of minority status creates the illusion that these individuals have personally chosen this lifestyle, whereas Wray adamantly see this predicament as beyond their control. Hiaasen does not believe in a victimless society and certainly does not deny the presence of racial and social oppression. He simply believes that each character be held accountable for his or her actions. For Carl Hiaasen, this social victimization has little to do with whether a character falls into the white trash nomenclature. It is the ability to rise above the contemporary stereotypes of greed, sloth, and perversion that make his “good” white trash characters shine and his “bad” white trash fall victim to some of the most innovative demises, arising from their own one-track minds, criminal negligence, and blatant apathetic disregard for the wonders of Florida’s native wilderness.

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ALLISON SWAIM

Allison Swaim, a freshman in the International Studies program, was raised by a father who pushed her to explore the novel and a mother who is a true lover of words.

Although she is not as well spoken as her sister or as well as read as her brother, Allison hopes to grow throughout her time at UO and someday change the world.

Mentor: Sophie Sapp

FICTION BEYOND KINSEY'S SCIENCE

SEXUALITY IN THEODORE STURGEON'S "THE WORLD WELL LOST"

In 1948 Alfred Kinsey released his scientific findings in *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*. Although the book was wildly popular it was also greatly discredited for both methodological and personal reasons. The Kinsey Reports explore a variety of themes, of which the most controversial and challenged were his observations on homosexuality in post-war America. Kinsey worked to quantitatively illustrate just how

commonplace homosexuality really was in society. Various reactions to his report, however, demonstrated the heteronormative trends of the post-war generation. Science fiction author Theodore Sturgeon explores homosexual themes through his fantastic narrative of futuristic space-time travel and famous aliens in his 1953 short story, "The World Well Lost." In his work, Sturgeon creates a socially identifiable homosexual character in a time when homosexuals were often placed into the category of the enemy-Other, a group enfreaked so heterosexuals could feel normal.

Taking advantage of the progressive nature of the United States at the time, and implicitly working against the enemy-othering of homosexuals, Sturgeon tells the story of a closeted homosexual human and mysteriously homosexual aliens. "The World Well Lost" narrates the story of two humanoid alien lovers visiting Earth from the far away planet of Dirbanu. Admired and wondered at by earthlings because of their love and affection for one another, the media dubs them the "lovebirds." The Dirbanu government, however, has politically distanced itself from Earth, showing an unexplained disgust for earthlings. While Earth's media covers the story of the mute and visionary lovebirds, Dirbanu calls for their arrest, labeling them as fugitives.

Two skilled astronauts who are fiercely loyal to each other, Rootes and Grunty, are charged with the duty of returning the lovebirds to Dirbanu. During the day-long journey in space, Grunty has loving and lustful dreams of his comrade, and the telepathic aliens begin to sense his unrequited homosexual feelings for

Rootes. When Grunty discovers this, he plans to kill the two lovebirds in order to protect his secret. The lovebirds dissuade him by showing him a series of pictures that illustrate that they are in fact two males, their genders hidden only by their clothes. When Grunty realizes this and begins to accept his similarities with the lovebirds, he releases them in an escape pod and goes back to dreaming of his hopeless love. Upon arriving on Dirbanu, the astronauts tell the alien government that the lovebirds died in transit, and finally, the reader discovers the reason for Dirbanu's disgust with Earth. The heterosexual couples of earth physically resemble the homosexual couples of the alien and homophobic Dirbanu. The lovebirds were wanted for arrest because the Dirbanu government did not want homosexual representatives abroad, feeling that might give others the idea that Dirbanu was nothing but a "gay planet." At the end of the story, Grunty begins to accept his homosexuality, but continues to hide his love for Rootes, due to his continued fear of public reaction.

Sturgeon, through his fictitious tale, addresses issues of homophobia and othering. While many Americans in this generation were not inclined to accept a homosexual neighbor, the thought of sexual variance in the distant and easily ignored neighboring galaxy seemed more reasonable. In a society that was not ready for Kinsey's empirical evidence pointing out how common a greatly ostracized difference was, the fictitious arena of science fiction allowed Sturgeon to create a wondrous world built on the exploration of difference. This allowed him to

comment on similar observations as Kinsey through a more accepting medium.

In this era of post-war boom, America was often thought of as a place of endless possibility filled with greatly expanding technology and science. The GI bill facilitated incredible growth in the economy, science and the middle class. The expansion of the middle class then perpetuated the idea of family values, the nuclear family unit, and heteronormative thinking: the idea that people should fall into distinct, complimentary, heterosexual gender roles. Imagine how sexuality was represented in this era's media: while science and technology are making advancements, married couples on television sleep in separate beds, the sight of Elvis's gyrating hips is judged too explicit for children and adults alike, and commercials are telling young boys to beware of hitching rides with seemingly normal men who secretly want nothing more than to take advantage of innocence. It was not until the 1960's that Barney and Betty Rubble challenged social norms and shared the same bed, so why would most of American society be ready to accept homosexuality as a natural or common way of life when any kind of sexual behavior was publicized as lewd?

Until 1973, homosexuality was labeled as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and most of society agreed with this designation, as illustrated by McCarthy-era hysteria towards the group (Whitehead). In popular literature, few successful books were published that discussed the topic.

Truman Capote was catapulted to fame after writing *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, a 1948 novel which touches on homosexual themes. Capote's work is generally characterized as a coming of age story, but in the last pages, homosexuality is candidly presented as Joel Harrison Knox, the protagonist, joins the "the queer lady in the window, and Joel accepts his destiny, which is to be homosexual" (Clarke 152). After the release, W. Somerset Maugham, the English playwright and novelist, noted Capote as the "hope of modern literature" and his work reached number nine on the New York Times Best Seller's List (Davis 29). While Capote was catapulted to fame for his work, and his success may hint at public interest surrounding homosexual themes, such celebrity when dealing with these themes was rare.

The futuristic arena of space allowed authors to push the boundaries of sexual normalcy even further, in a way that many orthodox authors, such as Capote, could not. Nonetheless, science fiction was hardly considered literature to much of the literary world. Although it was and is a genre with a wide following, it has never once won a Nobel Prize in Literature (Fillipo). In 1952, Sturgeon wrote "a good science fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, that would not have happened at all without its science content" (McGregor 225). In a broader sense, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines the genre as "a form of fiction that draws imaginatively on scientific knowledge and speculation in its plot, setting, theme, etc." The basis of science fiction is not only speculative science

however, as Sturgeon points out, but also has important ties in the exploration of difference and fears, in other words, human problems.

Theodore Sturgeon's main character in "The World Well Lost," Grunty, describes earthlings as "a people with few but massive taboos, a shockable, narrow, prissy people who follow rules" (72). Of these few taboos, a common one throughout almost all society, is the idea surrounding the Other, or the group that opposes the current understanding of what is "normal." Thomas Jefferson, a founding father of American society, once said that "a democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one percent of the people may take away the rights of the other forty-nine" (Faal 427). The framing of democracy is built on difference, where the majority rules the minority. This majority over minority idea is engrained in the framework of the nation. Kinsey's 1948 report evidenced a frequency of nearly 46% of males having reacted sexually to other men, and 37% of those had had at least one homosexual experience (Kinsey 656). With homosexuality as the minority, many people immediately labeled homosexual men as a different sort of human. The majority of the American public thought homosexuals to be dissimilar to them in all ways so they ostracized and marginalized the group, appearing to be repulsed by them as if they were nothing but trash. As Jefferson also points out, the minority is subject to overruling, a factor in bigotry. As we see with Grunty, the rule-abiding society of Sturgeon's Earth continues the tradition of Jefferson's observation. Furthermore, reaction to Kinsey's report illustrates that while he

attempted to naturalize the Other, the authority of the APA and others formed a majority to take away the legitimacy of his findings and discredit them.

Science fiction is an obvious departure from the hard science of Alfred Kinsey, but the critical reception of Kinsey's work is a thorough illustration of the world Sturgeon satires. Homosexuality was contradictory to the heteronormative ideals of the post-war era. Homosexuals were also deemed as salacious and perverted individuals. Along with homosexuals being labeled as an Other of society, critics of Kinsey linked homosexuality to criminals, juvenile delinquents, and prostitutes. American psychiatrist Edmund Berlger spoke out against Kinsey's volunteer subjects stating that they would have had to have been criminal in nature for such perverse results (Terry 309). Anthropologist, Margaret Mead, criticized Kinsey's methodology but also disparaged the study on the grounds that the data would demoralize the younger generations and give them excuses to practice sexual indecency (304). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was at least a monetary success and became a best seller, evidence of public interest surrounding the controversial findings.

Kinsey himself at times discredits his subjects, which worked to support the criticisms and made it easier for his audience to dismiss his findings. Kinsey labeled some of his interviewees as "uneducated and mentally duller individuals" (Kinsey 45). He also notes that homosexuality was most prevalent in the lowest strata of society (383), and in the least religiously devout members of society (483). Although Kinsey draws his

conclusions from collected data, his emphasis and exegesis on these somewhat arbitrary observations could have led readers to agree with Bergler's sentiment that his subjects had to have been perverse and substandard individuals, in other words: nothing but trash.

Where Kinsey had troubles, science fiction was able to explore, and Sturgeon was able to create a story in which a reader could identify with homosexual characters. Fiction allows for more freedom and speculation than does a factual medium such as science. Adam Roberts, author of *The History of Science Fiction*, notes Darko Suvin's influential approach to science fiction. He defined the genre as "a literary verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interactions of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (37). Suvin's idea validates the common themes of examining the Other, while also emphasizing a necessary departure from one's empirical environment. Donald Palumbo, author of *Erotic Universe*, elaborates on this by defining science fiction as a "symbolic easing of humanity's fear of the unknown" (3). Definitions of science fiction may differ but the idea of differencing and freedom from societal norms resonates through most.

Science fiction is thus established as an appropriate arena for the exploration of the Other, and dealing with the fear of difference. Fears which are commonly addressed in post-war science fiction are: science and technology (aligned with the post-

war advancements of super weapons), Communists (due to the Cold War), and, of course, the endless possibilities of robots and space. While imagination runs wild in the fantasy realm of science fiction, many authors, such as Sturgeon, focus on an Other closer to home. Instead of the enemy abroad, or in space, the perceived disparity of homosexuality has the possibility of being anywhere in society, which potentially heightens the fear factor. Sturgeon utilizes this societal fear and works to create a story with a classic masculine protagonist to make the difference of homosexuality more identifiable.

Although Sturgeon's writing style is rather esoteric, he indirectly builds from Kinsey's quantitative study, providing a counterpoint to his work. Sturgeon "transfers contemporary values and circumstances to an alternate world" (Palumbo 146) and reflects on homophobic society by using Dirbanu as an allegory for American culture. Sturgeon's use of aliens is a vehicle to create a *natural* understanding of the *abnormal*. While the lovebirds are from a foreign planet, light-years away, they are humanoid in appearance, with features and societal commonalities to earthlings. The most unusual thing about the aliens is their celebrity, which is due to their admirable expressions of love and tenderness, "for there was that about the lovebirds that made a deep enchantment" (Sturgeon 61). Because the earthlings in Sturgeon's futuristic world do not know the true identity and gender of the lovebirds, they are not immediately put into the category of the Other.

Whereas no visible differences arouse the suspicion of the homophobic people of Earth, “a people with few but massive taboos” (72), Grunty does realize their homosexuality. Grunty and the lovebirds are linked in more ways than just by sexual orientation. Both the lovebirds and Grunty are mute, illustrating that they have to hide their true identities to such an extent that their voices are lost. To Grunty, “words and picture, concepts and comparisons, were an endless swirling blizzard inside of him...words would not leave him except one or two at a time with long moments in between” (64). The aliens too are forced to explain their situation to Grunty through crude drawings; despite their shared intellectualism, their common mutism is an unfortunate loss.

Sturgeon uses the character of Grunty to transpose the idea of homosexuality as an alien abnormality to a masculine human. Not only is Grunty an earthling, but he is a successful and extraordinary one at that, he is prized as a dependable astronaut, without whom his captain would not leave the atmosphere. However, “Grunty understood this bond [between him and Rootes] and the fact that the only way it could conceivably be broken would be to explain it to Rootes” (65). This bond is inexplicable because Grunty’s loyal and ever-present nature was due to his love for his captain. This illustrates the enemy status that contemporary society assigned to homosexuals in the post-war era, and although Sturgeon sets his story in futuristic times, he nonetheless reflects on the American societal norms of the 1950’s. This idea is further elaborated by Grunty’s horror at the

lovebirds' discovery of his homosexuality. He feels that "no one must know what he is and what he thought," for if they did "it would be a disaster beyond bearing" (69). Because Grunty would be so villainized by society, he is forced to reject his overwhelming feelings of love and continues his silent struggle with his sexual identity and feelings.

Sturgeon further expresses his disdain of society's notion of homosexuals as a trashy Other by using the motif of a utopia. Sturgeon creates an extended metaphor early in the text positing that an ideal universe would be led by a blind man. The blind man has an "immense preoccupation with the whole" (62) because he is blind to the details of visible difference. Unlike Jefferson, this sightless leader does not follow the principle of 51% ruling over the 49%. This utopia therefore excludes the idea of the Other, and avoids creating an enemy out of difference. The metaphor emphasizes Sturgeon's attitude and his desire for a world where such differences are embraced, and not categorized as the enemy-Other.

As the metaphor continues, however, utopia is portrayed as unattainable, because no society is free of hatred, fear and othering. Dirbanu is described as a defense put in place against idealized civilizations, and consequently a protection against lovebirds. Because the lovebirds are individuals controlled only by the whims of their love, they are the closest entities to utopic beings, but because the universe is not perfect, something must thwart their paradigm. Dirbanu becomes an allegory for American society, a thwarter of any kind of love deemed abnormal or

improper. This allegory creates an image of Earth as a world that seeks out the Other and wishes to either deny difference or fight against it, making it impossible to live harmoniously together. The unattainable nature of utopia also illustrates Sturgeon's attitudes on the matter. His rejection of the Tiresias-like visionary hints at the importance of difference and the idea that one should not be blind to variations but rather aware and even productively confrontational.

While the characters and plot of Sturgeon's "The World Well Lost" may seem alien, futuristic, and improbable, the short story truly provides valuable commentary on the societal issues of the era. Because of the fantasy element of the genre, worlds can be created free from moral values, and as Palumbo states "the erotic has always been an important element of the fantastic" (Palumbo 146), thus giving Sturgeon room to play with ideas of sexual variance. Although the American counter culture began to grow in the late 1950's, Sturgeon and his exploration of heteronormativity and homosexual themes was incredibly cutting edge and because of this Sturgeon had trouble publishing his work. His publisher not only rejected what the Magazine Universe called his "most daring story yet," but also told all he knew to follow his lead (Delany 1983). Sturgeon, like Kinsey, was faced with controversy and trouble, but he was able, through the fantastic nature of the science fiction genre, to achieve a humanizing narrative that Kinsey's quantitative facts could not convey, and his story was eventually published by *Universe* in 1953.

As Sturgeon's allegory of the blind man illustrates, utopia is impossible, and the common trait of othering those deemed different is the cause of this impossibility. Even in the expanding and hopeful country of possibility that American society thought itself to be after World War II, utopia remained out of reach, and the issue of homosexuality is a cornerstone in this matter. Kinsey's 1948 work, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was groundbreaking, and is still considered a relevant study today. Sturgeon, through his fantastic narrative and social commentary in "The World Well Lost," created homosexual characters that were both alien and relatable, to a public whom Grunty labeled a prissy people with few but major taboos.

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