

Issue No.18/19

Writers Project

Labyrinth

College of San Mateo





The Writers Project and Labyrinth staff
would like to extend our sincere thanks to:

The CSM Honors Project faculty, staff, and students, with special thanks to
David Laderman, for their continued support of our club and our vision,

our inspiring club advisor, Sarah Mangin.

and the students who submitted their work to be considered for this publication.

We want to thank you for reading our new issue of Labyrinth and hope that this
publication continues to inspire you.

Keep writing. Keep learning. Keep creating.

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writersprojectsubmissions@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors-in-Chief

Angel Perez Garcia

Maryuri Aguilar Aguilar

Design Director

Charlesmore Largo

Advisor

Sarah Mangin

Editorial

Nathan Löw

Gearoid Walsh

Erika Kita

Aki Malig Dayag

Jayden Ong

Jeremy Chen

Yvonnereia Noe

Thoon Thit Sar Zaw

Daniela Ruiz

Abi Navarro

Natalia Castillo

Jenifer Olayo



Letter from the Editors



As longtime members of Writer's Project, we were honored to be invited to step into the roles of presidents and editors-in-chief. In this capacity, collaborating on such an exceptional issue has been both a joy and a privilege. We are proud to let the remarkable work of students across the San Mateo Community College District, along with the work done in collaboration with the Honors Program at the College of San Mateo, speak for itself. The passion and ingenuity woven into every submission, whether expressed through creative art or insightful research, are truly outstanding.

We could not have accomplished this without our incredible and supportive club members, who dedicated their time and creativity to Writer's Project, and our advisors, Sarah Mangin and David Laderman, whose guidance through the leadership transition was invaluable in bringing this issue to life.

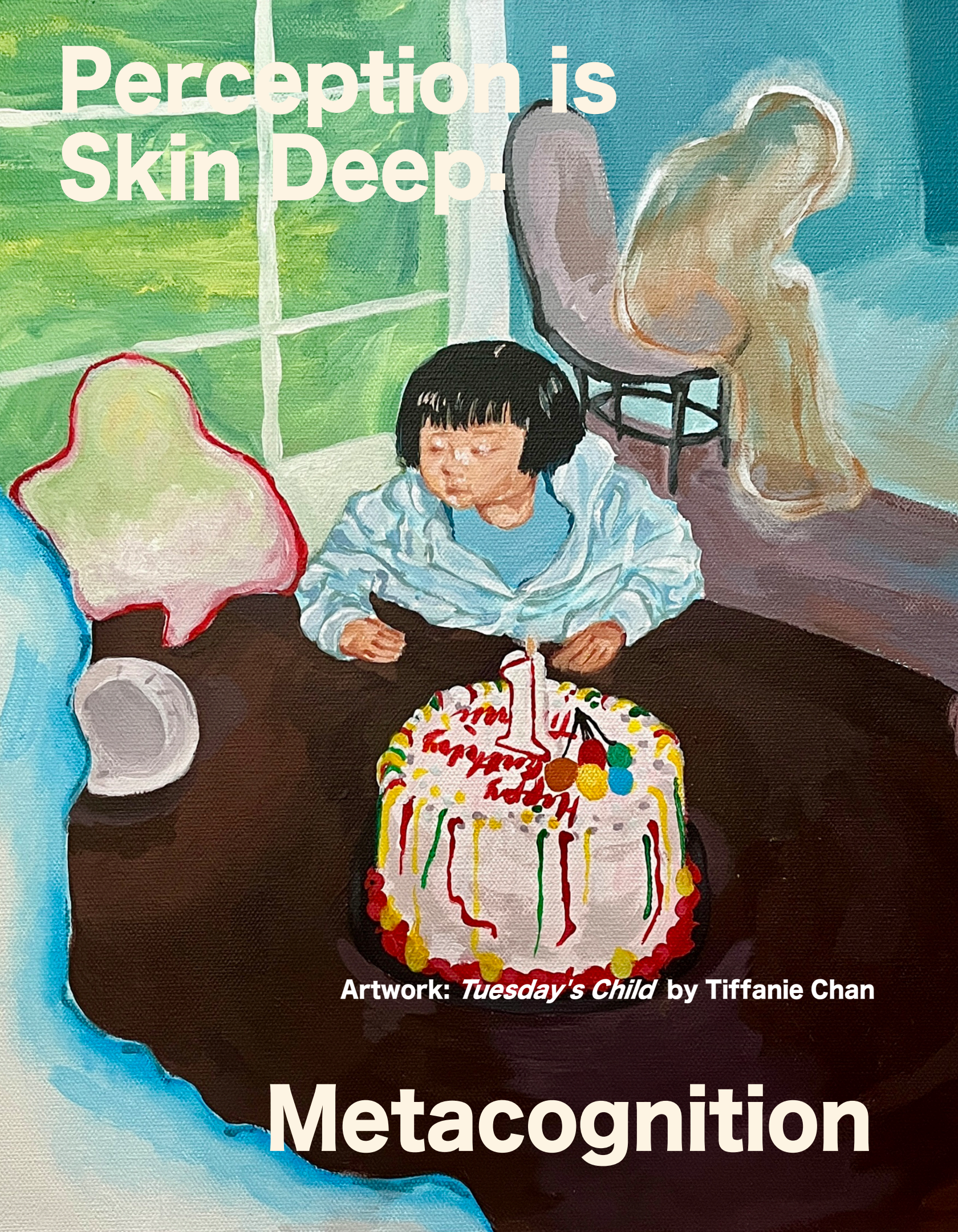
Issue 18/19, a joint release for the year 2025, centers around three themes: Metacognition, Pareidolia, and Divine Intervention. Metacognition encourages reflection on how we think, learn, and understand our own mental processes. Pareidolia examines our instinct to find shapes, faces, and meaning in randomness, revealing how the mind projects interpretation onto ambiguity. Divine Intervention explores moments that feel influenced by forces beyond the physical world, touching on fate, spirituality, and the unseen threads of the universe.

We release this issue with hope that students never cease creating, learning, and questioning the world around them.

Warm regards,

Angel Perez Garcia &
Maryuri Aguilar Aguilar

Perception is Skin Deep.



Artwork: *Tuesday's Child* by Tiffanie Chan

Metacognition

ART AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY: LUNCHEON ON THE GRASS AND A SUNDAY ON LA GRANDE JATTE

Phuong Hoang

In his Realist painting, *Luncheon on the Grass*, Edouard Manet depicts a nude woman lunching with two fully dressed men and a partially clothed woman washing herself in the background. The nude woman whose body is dramatically lit white hot casually but directly looks out at the viewer. The two men are dressed like middle to upper class gentlemen sit with the nude woman talking during the luncheon. In front of the nude woman is a basket of fruit and a round loaf of bread.

Leisure is also the subject of Georges Seurat's post-Impressionistic painting *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* where he uses his invented technique of Pointillism (a.k.a. Divisionism) to depict people's leisurely activities on this island park that lies in the Seine River, located between Neuilly and Levallois-Perret, at the gates of Paris. There is a mix of classes present but none are intermixing. Everyone appears to be within their own silo of thought or activity. In the foreground is an upper class couple who wear atelier finery as they walk their exotic pet monkey. To the left foreground sits a lower-class man smoking a cheap pipe adjacent to a working class woman doing embroidery. To her right is a middle-class man wearing a top hat and carrying a cane. Each is keeping within his/her respective domain to highlight the distinct class differences that persist despite the close physical proximity they share on the island park.

Both paintings are social commentaries about issues each respective artist found noteworthy. In *Luncheon on the Grass*, Manet is deliberately challenging traditional mythological and historical scenes considered high art. Manet wanted to paint modern life and human relationships in a more scientific manner: direct, observable, unidealized. Like Manet, Seurat also wanted to change traditional notions of painting by bringing science to bear on methods of Impressionism. Personally fascinated by how light was both wave and particle and that the human eye synthesizes colors to interpret then take away the imagery, Seurat developed Pointillism – a painting technique based on this science to use small dots of color that create an image grouped by these colors to make it visible from a distance.

By selecting leisure as the subject matter, both paintings present modern day choices in the lives of contemporary people depicting leisure activities as outdoors, social, and class-based reflecting the predominantly heteronormative social engagements of their day. Further, both paintings serve as reflections of bourgeois choices in leisure that resulted from the Industrial Age, reduced agricultural work, and mass urbanization largely attributed to Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann's reshaping of Paris.

As the prefect of Seine, Haussmann was selected by Emperor Napoleon III to implement an extensive urban renewal project which transformed the Paris landscape. In terms of urban design, Haussmann's most conspicuous change was the construction of grand avenues like the Champs Elysees that permitted better traffic flow and a more navigable cityscape. Less conspicuous but critical to public health were the improved sanitation systems that provided new water and sewage infrastructure. These construction projects precipitated appreciable employment that enhanced Paris' economy and expedited commerce.

Though Haussmann's project procured structural and aesthetic benefits, it also caused significant residential displacement forcing citizens from their

Photo: *Surfer on Strand* by Siri Hueg



homes as buildings were demolished to make way for more fashionable structures. Nevertheless, the Haussmannian architectural style became a leading prototype for urban development worldwide.

In both, Manet and Seurat depict modern day life with allusions specific to the impact of Haussmann's urban renewal project. Manet's allusion is more implied while Seurat's is explicit as he uses one of Haussmann's pet projects – *La Grande Jatte* – to reflect on contemporary issues that document social change even as they evoke conversation about contemporary living speaking to modern life as a mix of different experiences and emotions that had heretofore not been expressed.

Juxtaposing these similarities with their differences, it should be noted that Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* represents the Realist period style and provokes controversy in five different ways. First, Manet uses a perspective that was unrealistic with the woman in the pond being too close and too far at the same time, a pile of clothing and food displayed in disjointed fashion, with none of the figures appearing to occupy their respective weight and space. Secondly, Manet paints the nude woman's body with a series of pale blotches with no sensuality to the skin making her look hard, cold, and rigid. Thirdly, Manet's nude is considered "naked" not "nude" because they aren't symbolic muses or classical goddesses but real everyday women. Fourthly, these depictions are of people known to the audience which makes it impossible to break away from reality and leaves an uncomfortable sense of reflection.

Lastly, the nude woman – Victorine Meurand, a known courtesan – stares directly at the viewer as an affront with neither shame nor flirtation and holds the viewer's gaze for as long as we hold hers. In contrast to Manet's direct and deliberate affront to the traditional and artistic notions of high art, Seurat takes a more subtle but equally stunning visual approach with post-Impressionistic Pointillism. First exhibited at the 1886 Impressionist Exhibition, Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* depicts an intermixed group of people from different classes on the shaded shore enjoying their Sunday leisure time. All the figures appear to be in his/her respective world oblivious to those around them. There is a sense of visual isolation as the negative space envelopes the figures with visual bubbles of silence. There is a geometric simplification to the bodies and surroundings that flatten and remove emotion. By applying Pointillism, Seurat mimicked the world around him, showing that each dot has individual significance but each was connected to the next. Each dot fluctuated with the power of individual motion and fleeting momentary existence but combined to deliver a combined visual experience that created a whole to be translated by the viewer's interpretation of the image itself. Taken together, Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* and Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* demonstrate Art's distinctive ability to create an analytical discursive space for social reflection and progress.

Flappin' Past Archaic Gender Expectations: Cultural Impacts of the 1920s Flapper Dress

Siri Hueg

The thick, suffocating air, laced with the potent scent of Lucky Strike exhaust, settled over the jostling heads of tonight's speakeasy attendees. Dim yellow lighting cast long shadows, lending the room a seedy yet exhilarating atmosphere—anything could happen in the moving darkness of these clandestine bars, and often did. A woman can be seen carelessly twirling and swaying to the hypnotic rhythm of jazz, her arms and legs a blur in the smoky air. Freed from the constraints of long, restrictive fabrics, she smokes and drinks with abandon, moving through the crowd without hesitation. Oh no, mama, it's nothin' sinister, we're just dancin', she might've protested earlier that night. Yet, as her freshly trimmed bob bounces buoyantly (BBB!), she holds a Lucky Strike in one hand and a sidecar in the other and eyes the nearest potential suitor, her dress scandalously cut above the knee—a style that would have sent her pre-WWI-raised mother into hysterics—she embodies the iconography of a new, rebellious woman. She is a flapper girl, and she is breaking archaic norms left and right. The most iconic, and significant signifier of a 1920s flapper is the flapper dress. The dress, with its shorter hemlines, loose silhouette, and emphasis on comfort, rejected the traditional notions of modesty and propriety, paving the way for women to assert their freedom both in the public and private spheres. The flapper dress became an iconic symbol of rebellion and shifting gender norms of 1920s America, empowering white women to reject traditional expectations of womanhood and embrace newfound autonomy in both style and social behavior. The flapper dress was a visual representation of the newfound freedom and autonomy experienced by women in the 1920s, capturing the significant shifts in women's social roles following the ratification of the 19th Amendment and the transformations brought by World War I. This new style of dress helped redefine womanhood not only in fashion but in the broader sense of societal contribution. Women were beginning to break free from the male-constructed bubbles of maternity, virtue, and submission, and their evolving fashion choices mirrored their increased social mobility and independence. When women were granted suffrage in 1920, their societal influence grew alongside the image of the "new woman," allowing them to inch further out of patriarchal constraints, a shift evident in the flapper movement (Reinsch). Furthermore, Reinsch describes in, "Flapper Girls – Feminism and Consumer Society in the 1920s", that the flapper's notorious reputation, noting that these women engaged in "smoking in public, driving in cars, dancing the Charleston or the Shimmy, excessive consumption of alcohol in times of prohibition, nightly celebrations in jazz clubs and at petting parties, where men and women had premarital sexual experiences." This newfound autonomy marked a clear departure from the traditional expectation that a woman's place was within the home, and the emergence of female leisure culture. Before the war, women were seen as moral guardians of their families, ensuring that their children and husbands led respectable lives while maintaining a well-run household. However, with men suddenly drafted for the war, many wives and daughters stepped into their husbands' jobs as part of the total mobilization war effort, demonstrating women's capabilities outside domestic confines. This shift not only contributed to the emergence of a female workforce but also helped elevate women's social standing in the 1920s—a shift visibly reflected in flapper style. These dresses, with their less restrictive designs, were perfect not only for dancing the Charleston but also for supporting the active and independent lifestyles of women who, in this post-war climate, now had both more leisure time and new work opportunities. Rabinovitch-Fox highlights in her book, *Dress for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism*, the influence of fashion designer Coco Chanel, who embodied the flapper ethos: "Chanel, a self-made woman who took pride in her work and was unashamed of her sexuality, epitomized the flapper image both in her designs and in her persona... 'I make fashions women can live in, breathe in, feel comfortable in and look younger in,' Chanel attested about her designs" (Rabinovitch-Fox 81). Chanel's focus on functionality and freedom in

women's clothing mirrored the era's emerging attitude toward women's roles beyond tradition, a clear reflection of the new postwar world. While the flapper dress is a great symbol for the social liberation of white, middle- to upper-class women, it's essential to acknowledge that women of color were largely excluded from this movement. Flapper dresses came to represent a woman's liberty to break from tradition and express herself freely; however, flapper feminism was defined largely by material possessions and social activities. This glamorous, consumer-based image is iconic, but it also rendered the movement exclusive, highlighting a society that separated the struggles of white women from those of Black women. Despite the end of slavery in America, many Black women were confined to low-paying domestic or agricultural labor, making it difficult to afford the latest fashion trends or gain entry into the popular speakeasies and clubs. The media, through illustrations like those of artist John Held Jr., further perpetuated this exclusive image. In *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Carolyn Kitch describes how Held's cartoons of tall, fashionable girls in short dresses—always white, often accompanied by older men—were ubiquitous in popular magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Cosmopolitan* (Kitch 121). His drawings, along with on-screen representations of flappers like Clara Bow, solidified a cultural image of flapper women that was wealthy, white, and carefree. This popularized idea of liberation was thus reserved for white women, while Black women were marginalized in both media representation and in the social movements of the time. However, despite being left out of mainstream flapper culture, Black women were building their own movements that sought independence and social evolution. Historian and social justice activist, Keisha N. Blain, highlights the work of Irene M. Blackstone, president of the New York UNIA Ladies' Division in the early 1920s, who actively encouraged Black women to build their own livelihoods. In her article "Black Nationalist Women's Activism in 1920s Harlem," Blain quotes Blackstone: "I am American. I am Black, and I am proud that I am Black." Blackstone promoted self-sufficiency, urging Black women to leave domestic work in white households and instead rely on their unique skills and creativity (Blain). Although white women's movements gained more attention in popular culture, Black women like Blackstone fought just as fiercely to create an autonomous female identity, distinct not only from men but also from white-dominated society. The flapper dress of the 1920s became an iconic symbol of rebellion and progressing gender norms, reflecting a cultural moment of self-expression and autonomy for white women that was largely out of reach for Black women, whose contributions and struggles for independence took different forms. Although this era of bold, expressive, consumeristic fashion was cut short at the turn of the century by the Great Depression, the flapper's legacy remains visible today in the continued defiance of conservative expectations by women who pursue careers and constantly redefine the scope and capabilities of femininity. While the image of empowered femininity has evolved, with power suits replacing boyish dresses, the influence of the flapper's androgynous style endures, as women often feel compelled to adopt masculine styles in order to conform to male dominated professional settings. The flapper dress was not merely a fleeting trend with its legacy lying in plastic at a Spirit Halloween store, but a powerful marker of social transformation that has inspired future generations to continue challenging the boundaries between gendered expectations and true personal freedom.

i wonder if her breasts are large,
hips well endowed for child bearing,
waist thin for a man to wrap around.

i wonder if her skin is clear of any imperfection,
her eyes a perfect blue,
her lips soft and supple.

i wonder if she has the voice of an angel,
hair as long as the sea and as beautiful as the sky,
if her hands are perfectly crafted to fit a man's.

oh aphrodite.

does your body have scars like mine?
does your stomach roll on yourself?
do your arms jiggle as you move them?

is your face uneven and unbalanced?
are your lips chapped and bitten?
is your stomach like a hill?

do your legs look like hams when you sit?
when you walk are your feet uneven?
is your face too chubby?

are your nails bitten, not manicured?
are your teeth tinged with yellow, not pure white?
do stretch marks adorn your hips, chest, and arms?

oh aphrodite,
i know it is a curse to compare myself to you but i wish i could be
beautiful.
your statues and tapestries and paintings and murals are all too
beautiful.

i wish i could be pretty at least.
you are never depicted like me,
beauty is never depicted like me.

i wonder if crying makes your nose stuffy too,
if it makes your eyes red and your mouth dry.
i wonder if you could ever look like me too.

i wish we could be pretty.
i wish i could be pretty.

Oh Aphrodite

the quiet unnamed poet

“Damn right I’m pretty.” “I said petty.”

Cordelia Cho

Sighing deeply, the brunette pinched the bridge of their nose, they could feel a migraine forming in the back of their head. “Listen just because they said that they didn’t like you doesn’t give you the right to humiliate them like that.”

“Says you, they deserved every bit of it for disrespecting me, and in public no less,” The blond retorted.

“This is why I never take you anywhere, because everytime anybody mildly insults you, you always have to strike back, and in the worst ways possible.” the brunette hissed.

“Oh honey trust me I could be much, much, much worse if you want me to be” the blond teased, sending a wink in the brunette’s direction. The brunette shivered in disgust.

“I told you not to call me honey-”

“I’d prefer you call me by my name, surely you haven’t forgotten it?” The brunette interrupted. “Oh I’d never forget your name snookums,” the blond answered. “I just think that it’s so terribly drab, boring, lame, tedious, dull-”

“My name is not dull!” The brunette exclaimed, crossing their arms in offense. “Oh really you don’t think Johnny isn’t even the least bit dull?” The blond taunted. “One of the most common names in history and you don’t think it’s a bit boring?” the blond continued, slowly rising from the couch they had been lying on and beginning to step closer to the other.

“At least it’s better than your name.” Johnny muttered under his breath.

“Oh, really? And how pray tell is your name any better than mine?”

“You’re named after a fruit!” Johnny exclaimed.

“I’ll have you know that I’m not, in fact, named after a fruit, a fruit is named after me.” Clement declared, a smirk making its way onto his face. Oh, what Johnny wouldn’t give to slap that smirk right off his stupidly handsome face.

“Oh and I feel so terribly sorry for that poor fruit having to live throughout history being associated with you.” Johnny groaned, letting his head fall into his hands as he felt the migraine begin to take hold.

Clement closed the distance between them as he stood in front of Johnny, gently grasping his hands in his and pulling them away.

“Now, now, you’re too pretty to hide away like that.”

“You’re named after a fruit!” Johnny exclaimed.

“I’ll have you know that I’m not, in fact, named after a fruit, a fruit is named after me.” Clement declared, a smirk making its way onto his face. Oh, what Johnny wouldn’t give to slap that smirk right off his stupidly handsome face.

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Clement closed the distance between them as he stood in front of Johnny, gently grasping his hands in his and pulling them away.

“Now, now, you’re too pretty to hide away like that.” Clement whispered as he watched the other’s face begin to flush a light pink.

“You are insufferable,” Johnny mumbled as he looked up into the blond’s eyes, that glowed a beautiful molten gold color.

“I know, and yet somehow you still love me.” Clement mused, smiling down at his beloved husband.

“And I always will... till death do us part right?” Johnny asked, and Clement gave the exact same answer he always did.

“Not even death herself could take you from me dearest,” Clement whispered against his husband’s lips before he pressed them together. They stood embraced for what felt like an eternity but was merely seconds before they separated.

“Although it has been a while since I’ve last seen dear old death, when was the last time we’ve gotten together? A couple of months?” Clement questioned. “More like a couple centuries, hun.”

“We should really give her a call,” Clement noted. Johnny chuckled before he fell back into his beloved’s arms once more, where he would stay for as long as possible. Simply enjoying the feeling of his love’s still beating heart.



Artwork: Untitled "Motherhood"
by Evgennia Ananina

The Steroid Epidemic in Bodybuilding Psychological and Neurological Effects

Noah Sato

The behavior discussed in this paper focuses on the rise of anabolic steroid usage in the bodybuilding community, emphasizing the effects and misuse of these substances. Anabolic steroids, which are structurally similar to testosterone, are primarily used to boost muscle growth, enhance athletic performance and improve appearance. Recently there has been an uptick in steroid usage largely influenced by fitness personalities who glamorize their use and emphasize only the positive outcomes. Consequently, many followers overlook the consequences and quickly develop the misconception that steroids offer benefits without significant drawbacks. As someone passionate about fitness and bodybuilding, I believe it is crucial to shed light on this issue to educate both the fitness industry and the public about the risks associated with anabolic steroid use.

Approach 1: Psychobiology

The psychobiological approach delves into how anabolic steroid use affects the brain in terms of anxiety and speeding up the brain aging process. Using steroids is associated with changes in the brain, an increase in anxiety levels and a decline in cognitive function. Higher doses and potent forms of steroids can worsen symptoms of anxiety leading users to develop severe anxiety disorders often known as "roid rage." Moreover studies suggest that steroids contribute to hastening brain aging even after users have stopped using them. Studies have found that "long-term high-dose AAS use may have adverse effects on brain aging, potentially linked to dependency and exaggerated use of AASs" (Bjørnebekk et al. 2021). This decline in function is a side effect that many steroid users are not informed about.

Description of the Approach

The psychobiology approach delves into the connections between biology, neuroscience and behavior exploring how hormones, neurotransmitters and brain structures shape our actions and thoughts. It sheds light on the effects of steroids by investigating how these substances influence brain chemistry leading to shifts in behavior and mental well being. "The workings of the brain help to explain personality and social behavior, but a greater understanding of personality and social behavior is also necessary to better understand the brain." (Funder 305) This underscores the link between brain processes and behavior especially considering how steroids neurological alterations can significantly affect one's personality and social conduct.

Why This Approach Was Chosen

The psychobiology approach was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the direct biological impact of steroids on the brain and behavior. Unlike other approaches, psychobiology delves into the neurological alter-

ations caused by steroid use, offering insights into how these substances affect mental health and cognitive functions. By focusing on the biological basis of behavior, this approach highlights the critical neurological consequences of steroid use, which are often overlooked in discussions centered solely on physical performance and appearance.

Explanation of the Behavior Using Psychobiology

From a perspective that combines psychology and biology, the decision to use steroids is often linked to a desire for improved athletic abilities and physical appearance, influenced by how hormones affect the brain. Steroids, which mimic testosterone's effects, promote muscle growth and boost performance, offering gratification to users. Yet, these benefits come with drawbacks like increased anxiety and faster brain aging. Additionally, "Biological processes are the effects of behaviors or experiences as often as they are the causes. For example, a stressful environment will raise one's cortisol level, as will feeling depressed or anxious, and the result (not the cause) may be a smaller brain!" (Funder 305). This underscores how using steroids to enhance prowess may trigger biological shifts like heightened anxiety and cognitive decline. The psychobiological viewpoint suggests that prolonged steroid use can alter brain function over time leading to lasting issues and persistent anxiety, after discontinuation.

Likelihood of Continuation Based on Psychobiology

According to the psychobiology approach, there is a chance that individuals will keep using steroids because they find satisfaction in their physical abilities and appearance. The short term benefits of gaining more muscle mass and excelling in sports can sometimes overshadow the term negative effects on the brain. Nevertheless, as the harmful impacts on health and cognitive skills become more noticeable some users might decide to stop taking steroids to protect their health.

Conclusion on Psychobiology

The study of psychobiology offers an insight into the effects of using steroids, emphasizing the considerable influence on mental well being and cognitive abilities. This perspective stresses the significance of factoring in the aspects of behavior when assessing the consequences of steroid use providing perspectives on the lasting effects it may have.

Approach 2: Behaviorism

Behaviorism studies the actions linked to steroid usage looking at the influences and rewards that motivate this conduct. Anabolic steroids, similar to substances that are misused come with mental and emotional disadvantages. Some individuals start using steroids to improve their looks and enhance their self confidence. Nevertheless, enhancing body image steroids can worsen body dysmorphia resulting in a pattern of escalated usage, in pursuit of physical standards.

Description of the Approach

Behaviorism is a perspective that centers on actions and the external influences that either reward or discourage these actions. At its most basic level, "The fundamental tenet of behaviorism is that everything you do, and therefore everything you are, is learned through experience." (Funder 517) This viewpoint is applicable in exploring steroid consumption by investigating how outside influences like peer pressure and rewards play a role in starting and perpetuating this behavior.

Why This Approach Was Chosen

The reason why the behaviorism approach was selected is because it gives a structure for comprehending the factors and rewards that motivate steroid usage. In contrast to other methods, behaviorism highlights the significance of the surroundings in molding behavior, giving us an understanding of how cultural aspects play a part in the growing occurrence of steroid use within the bodybuilding sphere.

Explanation of the Behavior Using Behaviorism

From a behaviorist point of view the use of steroids can be understood by looking at how people are encouraged by the results they desire like looking better physically and gaining social approval. When online fitness influencers promote steroid use it acts as a motivator leading more people to follow suit. As individuals see the benefits of increased muscle growth and physical performance they are inclined to continue using steroids despite drawbacks. This behavior is influenced by the idea that "If an animal—or a person—performs a behavior, and the behavior is followed by a good result—a reinforcement—the behavior becomes more likely. If the behavior is followed by a punishment, it becomes less likely." (Funder 520). Additionally the behaviorist perspective points out that limited awareness about the side effects contributes to steroid use because users mainly see the positive aspects. Several studies have shown that "Anabolic steroids use is strongly associated with psychiatric morbidity" (Windfield), suggesting that negative psychological effects may only become evident after prolonged usage without acting as an immediate deterrent. This delayed impact emphasizes the need to address and bring attention to psychological risks associated with steroid use in order to break this cycle of reinforcement.

Likelihood of Continuation Based on Behaviorism

The behaviorism approach suggests that people are likely to keep using steroids because they find it rewarding. The immediate benefits of looking and gaining social acceptance act as incentives to continue using them. Moreover the absence of warnings about side effects plays a role in why this behavior persists.

Conclusion on Behaviorism

The behaviorism perspective provides perspectives on the factors and reinforcement methods that influence the use of steroids. By examining actions and the environmental forces that mold them, this perspective underscores the significance of considering cultural elements in initiatives to decrease steroid usage among bodybuilders.

Overall Conclusion

Studying the use of steroids from both behavioral perspectives helps us grasp the behavior better shedding light on the various neurological and external factors that play a role in its prevalence. The psychological aspect focuses on the impact steroid use has on brain health and cognitive abilities over time. On the other hand the behavioral perspective emphasizes how reinforcement mechanisms and social pressures drive this behavior showing how external factors contribute to its continuation. By combining these two viewpoints we develop an understanding of the complex influences behind anabolic steroid use leading to improved strategies, for intervention and education to combat this rising issue.

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AMANITA PHALLOIDES

Artwork: Untitled "Mushroom"
by Evgennia Ananina



Capitalism: Rationing the American Dream

Nam Viet

"Social class theory is an analytical approach that seeks to evaluate the ways in which an author, text, or audience reinforces or disrupts (intentionally or not) capitalist values (ideology). As a postmodern framework, social class theory is rooted in critiquing the artifacts of our culture for the ways in which they perpetuate a dominant ideology – in this case, that of capitalism and its subsequent values of classism and consumerism, which can be reinforced through form and content."

Introduction: Capitalism, Classism & the American Dream

The American Dream is a cultural phrase coined in 1931 that "entails the belief that everybody can find success in the United States through hard work, no matter their background." With a historical lineage that can be traced back to the founding of America, it also carries a heritage of preferential treatment that goes back just as far and parallels the origins of capitalism in America. To be sure, "[n]o nation has been more market-oriented in its origins and subsequent history than the United States of America. The very settling of the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and onward to Alaska and Hawaii, was one long entrepreneurial adventure."

As a cultural artifact, the American Dream is the "intellectual [ideal] that [was] created by [Americans] and provides information about [American] culture. This information may be economic, political, religious, or social about the people in that society." Originally signifying the pursuit of America's "collective well-being, [and] not [the promotion of] individual status," after WWII, the American Dream came to mean "American triumphalism" which linked winning the war with America's ideological superiority to justify that "American capitalist democracy was clearly the best way forward." Thus, the American Dream became the celebrated mechanism that led to (ig)/noble capitalist goals anchored in meritocracy. Throughout its genealogical evolution, the American Dream remained an artifact, a repository, that contained "enduring attitudes, behaviors, ideas, and traditions shared by [Americans] that [were] transmitted from one generation to the next." Coupled with capitalism, the American Dream now represents an exclusive hegemonic center that encapsulated Gilded Age capitalism to deepen and expand classism.

Coming from a refugee family, I am particularly interested in how capitalism rations the American Dream even as it actuates classism through its exploitation of migrants as a source of labor. Though classism exists among upper, middle, and lower working classes regardless of citizenship status, unlike American workers, immigrants and refugees – until, and sometimes even after they, receive full citizenship status – face additional oppressive conditions that range from denial of public benefits, legal rights or protection, lack of medical care, dual wage systems, inability to create and exclusion from unions, to deportation in addition to cultural and linguistic marginalization. In this reflection, I explore how my positionality as the (grand)/son of Vietnamese refugees assigns conditions that frame and ration opportunities to form a contextualized heritability impacting agency, practice, and performance. Oppressive conditions come in many different forms and with various combinations. Repressive power as exerted through the mechanisms within the material dialectic is one way to understand how capitalism generates classism and its impacts on migrant laborers. Marxist theorists believe "what drives historical change are the material realities of the economic base of society, rather than the ideological superstructure of politics, law, philosophy, religion, and art that is built upon the economic base." Therefore, to better understand this interaction, the material dialectic focuses on an analysis of reproduction of classism through economic and material mechanisms involving migrant laborers.

A material reality of society's economic base is industry and its demand for and dependency on labor. Industries and companies must find and pay for labor that is both the engine of its enterprise and the heart of its manufacturing capacity. Indeed, employers must cover "[I]abor costs [that] can account for as much as 70% of total business costs [and] include [] employee wages, benefits, payroll and other related taxes." Since capitalism is profit-based with its bottom line focused on optimizing company earnings, employers are motivated to continuously search for sources of cheap labor, creating an employee pool that receives lower wages, works longer hours with little or no benefits, and typically does so under more hazardous conditions. Modernly coined "3D (dirty,

Artwork: Mimi's Trolley By Emma Rose

dangerous, and demeaning) jobs,” immigrant laborers fill in the nation’s labor shortfalls and work in industries such as construction or mining where they are “15% more likely to be fatally injured on the job than were their native-born counterparts.”

In my grandfather’s case, he had the 3D job of being a machinist for Steelcraft Tool Company, an industry leader in high-performance, high-speed, steel cut-off blades for the tube and pipe industry. Typical occupational hazards include amputation, crushes/pin/stiff joints, vision impairment, deep cuts/scratches, metal splinters, toxic chemicals/gases, injuries from repetitive motions, and electrocutions. Though he was substantially overqualified for the job, my grandfather – as a refugee – did not have capital, network, or options. To provide for his family, he took the job offered, stood at the machine – often eating at his work station through lunch – to cut blades for 9 hours/day, 5-6 days/week without life or accident insurance for 32 grueling years. After more than 3 decades of loyal service, the company forcibly retired him without ever giving him stock, flexible spending, childcare options, 529 benefits, severance pay, 401K or pension plan.

Unfortunately, cases like my grandfather’s are not atypical but have pernicious historical precedence that date as far back as 1877. As America was becoming industrialized, Central Pacific – an industrial railroad giant – used immigrants from Europe and China (3,000 Irish and 10,000 Chinese) as its labor force to do the “back-breaking, unhealthful, and dangerous work” for \$1-2/day while Union Pacific – Central Pacific’s main competitor – used 20,000 workers (war veterans and Irish immigrants) “who laid 5 miles of track a day and died by the hundreds in the heat, the cold, and the battles with Indians opposing the invasion of their territory.” Exploitation of immigrants for this 3D type job happened all over the country and California was no exception: “[b]y 1880, Chinese immigrants [were] brought in by the railroads to do the backbreaking labor at pitiful wages [and] numbered 75,000 in California, almost one-tenth of the population.” Emboldened by government policies and subsidies, “industrial and political elites of North and South would take hold of the country and organize the greatest march of economic growth in human history.” These industry giants “skillful[ly] terraced[d]” black labor, white labor, Chinese labor, European immigrant labor, female labor with different rewards based on race, sex, national origin, and social class thereby reifying “the pyramid of wealth” that kept them firmly on top. When white nativists opposed the migrant labor population due to economic discontent and/or racial animosity, these industries would lobby for immigration laws – like the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the Asiatic Barred Zone Act – to appease its white majority.

Similarly, over 100 years later, “[i]n order to minimize the social impact of the large influx of Vietnamese refugees on an American public that was unfavorable to the VietNam War [and appease its voting majority], the United States government adapted the Refugee Dispersion Policy [] [with] influential factors [] primarily [being] political and financial, [and] not social [motivations].” “Scattering Southeast Asian refugees around the country to minimize the impact of resettlement on local communities was an initial policy goal. Indeed, the Vietnamese have established a presence even in those Midwest and Mountain states least populated by recent immigrants.” In other words, there was little to no regard for long-term refugee well-being as the Vietnamese were split up in response to studies that documented “a substantial number of Americans preferred [Vietnamese] exclusion” and an American public that sustained “the tradition of racism and hostility toward immigrant minority groups.” Moreover, “Vietnamese refugees [] arrived in the United States [] [to face] a legacy of hostility directed toward Asians” because nativists – both White and Black – perceived Vietnamese as belonging to the monolithic Asian Other, embodying the Yellow Peril, and nothing but the double-dealing “gook” or worse, the ungodly “VC” – America’s perpetual enemy and penultimate saboteur of the American Dream.

Even as nativists circled the wagons to protect their American Dream, my grandfather extended both arms and painstakingly reached for it – only to find that it oftentimes exceeded his grasp because he did not possess the built-in prerequisites necessary to achieve it. Min Zhou, a Chinese American sociologist, noted that during my grandfather’s time: “[d]espite significant improvements, the Vietnamese still lagged behind their American counterparts economically; substantially more Vietnamese families than average American families [were] still struggling below the poverty line.” As a mechanism within the material dialectic, the American Dream propelled nativists and immigrants alike. But it favored nativists who both defined and propagated it while it concurrently ostracized migrants who pursued and relied on it. Though it originally signified the pursuit of America’s collective well-being, by the time my grandfather resettled in America, the American Dream had become synonymous with an ultra-conservative ideological sense of superiority that made anything different from it the de facto exotic and threatening

“Other”. In this context, the American Dream was deeply entrenched in systems that favored fluent Western-accented English speakers, Western educated American graduates, and historically American multi-generational wealth builders. As a fresh-off-the-boat political refugee emigrating from a Communist country that defeated and cost America more than 58,000 lives, not only did my grandfather not meet these criteria, but he was deemed both “undesirable” and “undeserving” to boot.

Hegemonic Power: Hierarchy through Cultural Production

“While Marxism focuses on an analysis of the reproduction of class through economic and material mechanisms (repressive power), neo-Marxism focuses on the reproduction of class hierarchy through a cultural analysis of artifacts (hegemonic power).” In my grandfather’s case, and alongside the American Dream, was the hegemonic power exerted through U.S. dispersal resettlement policy with two of the primary goals being assimilation and prevention of ethnic enclaves. By doing this, Vietnamese refugees were “deprived of the emotional, social and psychological support generated from the extended family and also the support that was generated from a shared culture, language, customs and experience” which, in turn, increased and cemented their dependency on local non-ethnic resources that could – or would – not support cultural sustenance and ultimately exacerbated the inherent adaptation and generational tensions that invariably result from forced migration.

“From the assimilationist standpoint, distinctive ethnic traits such as native languages, ethnic identity, ethnic institutions, and ethnic social relations are assumed to be sources of disadvantages [] [and] immigrants must free themselves from their old cultures in order to begin rising up from marginal positions.” Simply because he was a Vietnamese refugee, my grandfather’s positionality was that of a lesser undesirable, an outsider, someone the hegemonic center placed at the periphery of the American Dream, a warm body that was considered best suited to be a working proletariat cog within its vast power structure. The maintenance of bourgeois values, through pop culture, consumerism, and assimilation would ensure that the hegemonic center would sustain its seat of power as successive generations would abandon their native tongue and self-identify with the system into which they are born and have subsequently accepted in their post-assimilationist state. As espoused by Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, “[n]eo-Marxism believes that culture reproduces the class structure of society. The bourgeoisie, the ones who control the world’s economic, natural, and human resources, can manipulate the culture to maintain their position of power through the creation of texts [and cultural artifacts that support dominant structures, beliefs, and practices] in the culture.”

Conclusion: Honoring Heritage & History

Knowing this gives me pause to wonder where I, as a second generation American of Vietnamese descent, fall on this post-assimilationist spectrum and how far am I away from the American Dream? Though my own positionality is different and not entirely the same as that of my grandfather’s, there are some intersectional elements that I have inherited. Among those are my conditions as:

- a proletariat
- an outsider on the periphery
- a member of the monolithic Asian Other
- an embodiment of the Yellow Peril
- an ostracized undesirable
- an undeserving pursuer of the American Dream

These conditions were undeniably highlighted and unfortunately heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic when those who had the least lost the most. Disproportionately impacted by the devastation wrought by the pandemic, proletariats like my family did not have equal ability, access, or utilization to services and technology, comparable choices to telecommute or work from home, livable means or reserved wealth to meet basic needs. To further aggravate these circumstances, I belong to an identifiably racialized minority perceived to be of Asian descent, relegated to become part of the monolithic mythic Other, and scapegoated for the Yellow Peril that was in fact a virus. Documented by organizations such as StopAAPIHate.org, Asian Americans suffered varying degrees of harassment, prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, exclusion, and violence despite being – and perhaps because they dared to consider themselves – Americans.

At this point, I cannot really answer this question because of three major reasons: (1) my journey as a Vietnamese American adult has only just begun; (2) different spheres of social influence constantly shift and impact hegemonic power; and (3) solidarity among People of Color and their allies engage with and reconstitute power dynamics. Recognizing that this question is one that can only be answered as I live my life with intent, assert my rights, and exercise commensurate social responsibility, I take each step with care to honor both my heritage and the history yet to written.

American history is littered with the lingering entrails of slavery's ravaged corpse. Only recently have studies emerged contrasting the classic storytelling of the founding fathers in 1776, described as a heroic declaration of independence against the tyrannical taxation of England. How can a country which prides itself on democracy acknowledge and instead admit to a reliance upon the enslavement of thousands of African American lives, both past and present? The effects of these initial brutalities still ripple through society in its current form, and Ta-Nehisi Coates analyzes his own navigation within slavery's generational consequences and his attempts to evade them through education in *Between the World and Me*. While Coates' relationship with formal education is complicated, his exposure to other world-views prevails as his most valuable learning experience.

Though unaware at the time, Coates' upbringing in Baltimore reflects the generational knowledge that black bodies are unsafe. Beginning with his early encounters with the streets, and "the array of lethal puzzles and strange perils that seem to rise up from the asphalt itself" (21), each day brought a test of survival. Incorrect body language, tone of voice, or a wrong turn down an unfriendly avenue could result in physical violence. He discusses the visceral fear of simply existing, even as a black child amongst other black children, and the harsh actions they take upon each other in desperate displays of power. Attempting to maintain control of their own bodies with loud clothing and louder reactions is the only opportunity they may ever have to demonstrate their autonomy; Coates reflects upon a time when another boy threatens him with a gun merely for the display of hierarchy. Even the parents of these children exhibit violence in the homes, as a way to almost symbolically teach their children that their bodies are not to be taken for granted. After recalling an instance where his father beats him for getting robbed, and again for threatening a teacher, Coates determines that no amount of violence would help him or others like him escape from their fate, and that survival is the most important lesson of all.

The confining structures of early education are presented only as a deference from a more immediate punishment. While the streets represent a clear, instantaneous reaction upon the body, the schools institute obedience as their primary education. Students spend time practicing raising hands, standing in line, and working quietly as a way to enforce compliance; the material in the classroom is irrelevant to the daily existence of the children in attendance. Coates feels that the schools are not for learning at all, but rather for "an escape from death and penal warehousing" (26). He's justified in this assessment by studies from the American Civil Liberty Union's "School-to-Prison Pipeline" project, whose research and funding is focused on confronting the overwhelming trend of disproportionately funneling children of color into juvenile detention facilities and the legal system. The ACLU's project shares some startling statistics about the disproportionate punishments between black and white students in k-12 schools: that "black students represent 31% of school-related arrests while only composing 16% of total public school enrollment; that black students are suspended or expelled three times more often than white students; and that students who are suspended or expelled for discretionary violations are three times more likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice

UNLEARNING: TA-NEHISI COATES LIFTS THE VEIL OF EDUCATION

Holly Avner

system the following year" (ACLU, School-to-Prison Pipeline). Coates acknowledges this data to explain his frustration with the k-12 school system, feeling disconnected to the coursework and inability to escape what seems to be an almost certainly punitive fate.

While Coates did experience an enormous period of intellectual development during his college days, he was rightfully skeptical of the higher educational institutions. The oldest and most esteemed universities were built upon the notion of Christian conversion of indigenous peoples in order to assimilate them into white Anglo-Saxon homogeneity, to crush any chance of resistance or defense of brutally stolen lands.

In addition to profiting from the decimation of a substantial percentage of the native population (and the selling of native children overseas as well), the first five official universities in the then British American colonies - Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Codrington and New Jersey - were physically constructed using the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants (Wilder, 18). When education transcended the initial expansion of Christianity into more academic purposes, the very bodies that built these institutions were denied access to attend the facilities, instead being forced to wait upon the pupils and staff. At Dartmouth College in particular, there were "more slaves than faculty, administrators, or active trustees; ... [and] arguably as many enslaved black people as there were students in the college course" (Wilder, 70.) Because of this sordid history, as well as inequitable access to socioeconomic resources, the populations of these universities are still predominantly white or Asian, athletics (which are not grade dependent) being the only exception.

In contrast to predominantly white universities, historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are an essential experience for personal growth, though not necessarily in a linear fashion. While Coates attends Howard University in Washington D.C. (or "Chocolate City," referring to the high percentage of African American citizens), he considers his most prominent discovery to be the variety of culture he encounters rather than the curriculum itself. He specifically states that he was "admitted to Howard University, but formed and shaped by The Mecca" (40), a culmination of powerful black voices, history, and geography that expose him to possibilities that his imagination could not conceive in his hometown of Baltimore. Safety at school without the constant looming fear of bodily harm opened the door to curiosity, and acceptance of black culture from professors to pupils affirmed his attendance.

The removal of the stereotype threat permits black students to excel in their chosen field of study without succumbing to the influence of racial tension or social stigmas when surrounded by their peers. According to the United Negro College Fund, while HBCUs represent only 3% of colleges nationwide, they award a striking 19% of bachelor's degrees in STEM fields to

African Americans in the United States (Bridges). Primarily, for Coates, Howard University became a sanctuary in which to ask questions, to explore history and to dig deeper into what it truly means to realize and recapture black freedom in modern America.

By departing the confines of traditional learning, Coates emerges into a new era of spiritual understanding. Through the pursuit of journalism, he is able to ask for the answers to questions previously inaccessible; he describes writing as “another tool of exploration, another way of unveiling the laws that bound my body” (63). Upon feeling that his time at Howard was waning, he invested instead in his relationship with the woman who became the mother of his child.

They relocate to New York with their young son and while Coates marvels at the vast variety of life in the metropolis, he remarks upon the familiarity of his neighborhood to his childhood home of Baltimore. Here, he grapples with the juxtaposition of cavalier Dreamers coexisting with, yet still exerting power over people of color. Struggling to feel at home, contemplating the responsibilities of parenthood, Coates determines he is prepared for the next steps of his journey, the strange and unexpected voyage overseas. France altered his perspective in a way comparable to the Mecca of Howard University, but on a grander scale: not only free to simply exist, he was unburdened from the crushing constriction of America’s violent history. He remarks that “we are not their particular ‘problem,’ nor their national guilt” (127-128), making it possible to enjoy activities untethered to the fear of bodily harm. This is the life he so desires for his son, even though he cannot release the ingrained generational trauma that functioned as his education for his entire life.

Between the World and Me conveys Coates’ reflection on his struggle to understand and survive with the pressure of being “twice as good” in a world innately designed to stack against him and other people of color. From the violent streets of Baltimore to the unexceptional obedience of school, even in the haven of Howard University, traditional methods of learning could not guide him to the spiritual answers and longing for community he sought. Only through the wisdom gained by expanding his worldview does he find the hope to raise his son from a position of security, to share their collective struggle without collapsing beneath the weight of the American Dream.

Artwork: Plefgersee, Germany by Lena Li



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Kumain Ka Na?: The Language of Food in Filipino Families and Culture in Elaine Castillo's *America Is Not the Heart*

The book navigates through the hardships of migration. How does the journey unite generations?

Aki Dayag

The kamayan feast begins as heaping mountains of white rice, chopped green mangoes, pansit noodles, fried tilapia, and lechon are stacked and merged under overlapping dark green banana leaves. Food plays a central role in Filipino families, expressing love, apologies, sorrow, and more in ways language cannot. It is a constant factor in the Filipino culture that brings generations together around the table to connect, regardless of age or language spoken. In her novel, *America Is Not the Heart*, Elaine Castillo masterfully portrays the role of food as a bridge for Filipino families navigating the hardships of migration and adjustment to life in the United States. Through the story of Hero (Geronima) de Vera, an anti-Marcos regime rebel living with her uncle's wife, Paz, and young daughter, Roni, in Milpitas, California, Castillo brings together women of different generations with Filipino food as a unifying force.

As Hero arrives at her uncle Pol's house in Milpitas, she initially gives a poor first impression to Paz, Pol's wife, a Pangasinan nurse. However, Paz quickly attempts to restart their interaction by asking Hero if she's hungry. From Hero's perspective, she recalls, "Then she crossed the kitchen to the rice cooker on the counter and asked Gutom ka, Ni-mang? Gloria made pinakbet. Pol said it was your favorite" (35). Despite her embarrassment over her comment about the appearance of their home, Hero recognizes Paz's invitation to eat as a chance to start anew. The dish that Paz has prepared, pinakbet—sautéed vegetables and meat in shrimp paste—is even Hero's favorite.

Hero accepts Paz's invitation by acknowledging that she is indeed hungry, recognizing that refusing would only add to the poor impression she has already made. Similarly to my mother, her invitation to eat food implies either an apology or her way to show affection. In Filipino families, food is a language we all understand. Through the simple act of sharing food, Hero and Paz can begin to establish a connection and move beyond their initial awkward interaction.

Hero's relationship with Roni, the fiery young daughter of Paz and Pol who shares her name with Hero, plays a significant role in the novel as the two develop a deep and meaningful connection over shared meals. During one meal, Hero compliments Roni's appetite as she eats cold corned beef and rice. Roni is voracious when it comes to food, eating heaping amounts and savoring each bite. With her mouth still full, Roni explains that she did not use to eat before, adding, "A year ago, I only ate Nestle baby milk. Formula, she meant...At to this sisterly interaction with Hero and Roni, my ate and I also often initiate deeper conversations around the dining table. Sometimes, the silence of eating together allows us the courage to say what's on our minds and progress from small talk. Through this conversation, Hero gains a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by Roni and her family: "But in those early, early California years, it was just the four of them—Paz, Carmen, Grandma Sisang, and Roni—living in the small apartment for half of the year...Paz and Roni slept in the living room; Roni on the couch, Paz on the floor" (73). Like many Filipino migrant families, Paz and Pol's family did not even have a suitable living situation for a family of four. They were doing everything they can to survive. Their child even had to starve since they did not have access to solid baby foods. Hero begins to understand Roni's generous appetite for food since she learns that the young girl had barely eaten for four years, living on baby formula. By sharing this personal trauma with Hero around the dining table, Roni and Hero forged a strong sisterly connection over their shared experiences.

In Castillo's *America Is Not the Heart*, the novel's conclusion features a heartwarming domestic scene where the De Vera family sets the table for dinner, showcasing their growing connection as a community and family. Castillo's writing brings the scene to life, as Pol serves himself a portion of pancit and says, "Bon appetit" with a formal smile, while Paz responds with a mix of laughter and tears. This interaction is a moment of simple joy and a reminder of the importance of shared meals. Even Hero, the novel's protagonist, cannot remember the last time they ate together. As the family shares food, "Hero reached for Roni's empty plate and passed it to Paz, who refilled the plate, then passed it back to Hero, who passed it back to Roni" (405). This act symbolizes the power of food to bring people together and pass on legacies to future generations. It is a reminder of the homeland and the continuation of our roots. Eating traditional foods together becomes an ode to ancestors and a powerful way to connect and create community.

The power of food in bringing people together, bridging cultural gaps, and creating a sense of connection is a central theme in Elaine Castillo's *America Is Not the Heart*. Through Hero's experiences with her Filipino migrant family in the United States, we see how food plays an essential role in bringing generations together and providing a sense of comfort and familiarity, even in the face of difficult circumstances. Whether it is through Hero's relationship with Paz and Roni, or her memories of her childhood in the Philippines, Castillo demonstrates the enduring importance of food in Filipino culture. As the novel suggests, food is not just a source of sustenance, but a way of expressing love, forgiveness, and solidarity. Love is passed around the dinner table. By exploring these themes, *America Is Not the Heart* offers a moving reflection on how food can unite us, even amid cultural and generational differences.

Talk of a First-Generation College Student

Tony Mendoza-Barraza

Growing up in a traditional Mexican household was never easy. As I navigated this environment, I slowly found myself on the path that led me here—College of San Mateo. To my mother, this moment was the realization of her dreams. It is not every day that a parent gets to witness their firstborn child achieve something they were unable to due to circumstance. Being the firstborn son comes with immense expectations, much like a camel carrying water in its hump. The admiration and praise from family, friends, and well-wishers for simply completing assignments or remembering a few words for a decent grade were flattering, but reality soon proved that college, even a community college, is vastly different. At College of San Mateo, I faced challenges that tested my intellect, my energy, and my will to persist. There were days when I, along with many other students, felt inadequate simply because I could not answer a question correctly on a test. This brings me to the core of the struggle: the fear of failure. In my Mexican household, with a single mother and younger brothers who looked up to me, failure was never a choice. I had to be the role model, the epitome of responsibility, the one who succeeded where others may have faltered. The pressure to embody manhood and perform well academically weighed heavily on me. What stress or pain this caused was never a question I could afford to ask, because I had no choice. I had to find a way out of a situation I never wanted to be in. Some people would ask, “Why don’t you just leave then?” as if my complaints were an inconvenience to them. I would always respond that it isn’t so simple, that my circumstances are far more complex. As a full-time college student and full-time employee, I juggle numerous responsibilities. On top of that, I am still trying to live up to the image of the perfect student for my younger siblings.

There are times when I feel like I am failing them, as the pressure to keep going overwhelms me. The desire to give up surfaces when I feel like I’m not good enough, but I can’t afford to entertain such thoughts. I’m constantly moving from one task to the next, with no time to pause and address my own doubts. When my grades don’t shatter my confidence, everything else seems to. In addition to being the first in my family to attend college, I am also the first to openly identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community—a fact my family did not anticipate. This was the turning point for me, when I realized just how complicated and stressful my existence had become. At times, during lectures, I reflect on how society measures success through numbers, grades, and achievements, quantifying our worth based on these metrics. Yet, despite the weight of these expectations, I continue to pick myself up. I have to recognize one key thing: I am here, in college, making it work. College has become a safety net, a place where, despite the challenges of my background, I can find moments to breathe. I am still learning to appreciate all that life, and this educational journey have to offer. I remind myself that everyone is facing their own struggles, and even in the rain, there is always someone with an umbrella ready to help. In conclusion, my experience as a first-generation college student has been filled with challenges, but it has also been an invaluable journey. The weight of expectations is always present, and it is a daunting, unpredictable challenge. As I continue to navigate this journey, I remain hopeful that it will ultimately be worth it. To my fellow college students—no matter your struggles or background—you are never alone. Keep going, and remember that this journey, though difficult, will lead to greater things. Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I wish you all the best in your own journey.

Artwork: San Gregorio By Jessica Katherine Birdwell



Afirmación

Adora tu piel de miel
Que me hace
enloquecer
con su
dulcé
Tu piel que luce
Como el sol
Para poderte ver
mejor
Adora tu piel de
miel
Adora
tu piel

Natalie Godinez

Affirmation

Adore your skin that is
like honey
Its sweetness
make
me go crazy
Your skin
shines like the sun
To see you better
Adore your skin that is
like honey
Adore
your skin

Artwork: Origami
Crane by Barbara
Gibb

The Internet is a bizarre world where “apathy’s a tragedy, and boredom is a crime” (Burnham), referring to the lines of the song “Welcome to the Internet” by Bo Burnham. That world makes me feel more irritated than pleased.

More efficient than the rabbit hole channeling Alice to the wonderland, it only requires some clicks and slides of fingers on the smartphone for us to dive into the cosmos of information. Indeed, the internet creates and facilitates various novel and flexible patterns of modern life in work, study, and socialization. I also enjoy the convenience of online databases which saves me time to commute to a local library and search materials among shelves of books. However, it is not only the worthwhile information but also toxic messages efficiently disseminating through circuits.

Toxic messages—including violence, lies, ill wills, and all sorts of ideas a decent person would never be proud to introduce to others—flood to people on the internet. I do not dare let my four-year-old daughter watch YouTube or navigate on Google without company because I know there are inappropriate ads, or phishing links on the internet, and even worse, I cannot anticipate when, where, and in what form they will appear. If Burnham does not exaggerate (and I know he is not), just imagining that my daughter sees a scene of pencil colored Harry Potter characters doing indescribable behaviors after she types down “Harry Potter” in a search bar gives me brain damage. The internet renders me helpless as the victim of brain junk foods which are fed to me before I know it.

Human nature is another factor contributing to the fact that people cannot escape from low-quality contents on the internet, such as rumors. We naturally can “be happy, be horny, be bursting with rage” (Burnham), and the internet maneuvers in bringing it out of us. Designed to attune with human nature, rumors go viral more easily and faster than truths which could be plain, ugly, and unsexy. During the pandemic, experts and officials in medicine hosted numerous lengthy press conferences to raise the vaccination coverage rate, but it took only one suggestion from then-President Trump to foster misleading beliefs on disinfectants which entailed more cases of accidental poisonings (Kluger).

In the 2016 presidential election, I heard more discussions on Hilary’s creepy diet and a pedophilia ring she was accused to be involved in but got less information about her agendas. We are drowned in things attractive in appearance on the internet, as Burnham sings: “could I interest you in everything? All of the time... Anything and everything. All of the time” (Burnham). Unfortunately, it comes with a price for us to get used to things designed to awe us before manipulating us. Contrary to being patient, critical, and rational, people fooled by the internet tend to become short-tempered, gullible, and ignorant, which is evident in the flourishing of paparazzi, TikTok, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs).

There are people who spend time and energy on the life of celebrities, endless short-formed videos, and influencers with fascinating assertions or perfect bodies and show less interest with a full-time movie, a 200-page book, and a 45-minute lecture in class. That worries me a lot because young generations, including my daughter, are born in the time when the internet is a necessity for humans.

The Irritating Internet

Yutian Cheng

It is an unprecedented challenge for modern parents to teach their kids to use the internet and avoid being used by it.

Although the internet seems to provide everyone having access to it the opportunity to express and exchange ideas, the problematic internet atmosphere can hinder sincere and critical conversations which should be encouraged. An experience of my friend exemplifies how the aggressive internet environment scares off people who wish to share and obtain insights in peace and respect.

My friend, a philosophy major student in UC Berkeley, told me that on the internet, people are commonly irritated rather than inspired by differences found in the process of communication, and some even stop listening and reasoning and respond with insulting and cursing. There were so many times she was called by ethnicity, gender, and any unfair or irrelevant labels when she tried to demonstrate her points on feminism with strangers on a forum. Tired of anger, disappointment, and humiliation, she has given up on participating in online discussions about serious topics she interests. Of course, it is amazing the internet connects us with people all over the world.

The problem is: we should be alert and interfere when the manner of expression prevents real communication from occurring. Discussions on the internet take place on the basis of make-up identifications, intangible IPs, and hidden intentions that somehow compromise the burden of ethics and morality—the norms restraining people’s behaviors in reality.

A well-behaved kid in-person can turn into a bully online, where the chances of getting caught and facing consequences is lower than they are for bullying at school. Moreover, compared with the advancing technologies of information and communication, the legislation on cyberviolence lags behind. In terms of cyberbullying, even though 48 states have included it in their harassment laws, only in 25 states do laws offer protection to victims off campus (Statista), not to mention the lack of resort from the federal law.

Consequently, abusers get more active and ruthless on the internet, which intensifies the trend in our society of getting disrespectful, polarized, and extreme.

Although it irritates me so much, I do not blame the internet per se for bad contents, hostile vibe, and cyberviolence. It is us, the creator and users of the internet, who should be moral, rational, and responsible when interacting with human fellows in any possible forms.

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Axolotl

Mathew Hamilton

Swimming through clear waters,
in a lake I can't pronounce
Existing in bliss and tranquility
no matter the circumstance

In a world of chaos,
how can it be so that
a being so pure and innocent
can still thrive within it

Though your numbers dwindle
and your time runs short,
I always see you smile
and warmth fills my heart

Some may not know you,
or know your struggles
but I'll always introduce you
because all should know your face

I'm envious of your positivity
and how you persevere ever on
I wish I wasn't born human
So I could swim alongside you

Photo: Base Runners By Daniel Gold-
berger

Elon

Mazzy

Elon, I know a salute
Whenever I see it
And you concentrate children in camps
-So I believe it
Your teslas, the swasticators are a problem,
but it's not the people who drive them
it's not the people who buy them
But the person who is selling them
We're taught to blame the consumer
But it's what's being consumed that's the issue
And it's also the crimes you commit that you won't admit to.

Shrouded in secrecy, stepped on bodies enshrouded
The white house is too crowded
We didn't elect you to be there;
So don't be surprised when we start to care.

Don't get me started on your breaches of privacy
Don't get me started on your coup, we know what you wanna do
Don't get me started on the child mining, the child slaves
Don't get me started on your south african apartheid origin story
Don't get me started on your palestinian apartheid current investment

So if you're putting children in cages
Giving robots our wages
And then expect the people's outrage
Because this is outrageous

You can link the stars
And you can move to mars
But in our short lives is this the mark
You wanna make
Just for the sake of the bank tucked in your pockets
Clearly your morals have flown away in your rockets.

Social Media Is Critical Thinking-Unfriendly, But Why?

Yutian Cheng

There is a fundamental diversion of interest between social media companies and their users. Consequently, social media challenges and damages their user's ability to think critically.

For the top 5 social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are owned by Meta, YouTube is owned by Google, and TikTok is owned by ByteDance (Statista). Except for ByteDance, a private company in China, Meta and Google are listed business corporations that aim to gain as much as profit for, theoretically, their shareholders. Interestingly, on November 2nd, 2024, 79.37% Meta and 62.43% Alphabet, the umbrella organization of Google, shares are held by institutional investors (Yahoo Finance), indicating that these companies do businesses for the sake of institutional shareholders, who are not the user of their social media products but money chasers mostly located on the Wall Street in the U.S. and the Lombard Street in the U.K. This profit-oriented nature of the social media company is also evident in their revenue structure. The Meta annual financial report shows that advertising accounts for 98.53%, 97.91%, and 97.46% of the total revenue in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (Meta). The yearly report of Alphabet reveals that, in 2021 and 2022, Google advertising contributes to 81.31% and 79.37% revenue. Alphabet's rest revenue is made by its B2B institutions, such as Google Cloud, serving other businesses and having nothing to do with dealing with users like you and me watching or creating videos on YouTube. The financial report also shows that advertising is the only way for YouTube to generate revenue (Alphabet). Advertiser-supported profit model is the lifeline of social media companies and shapes the operating philosophy and method of social media platforms. Social media companies live on advertiser patrons, and advertisers' generosity only casts on the platform owing the impressive capability to channel businesses to susceptible customers. Hence, social media shares the same business logic with the TV industry—making money on marketing. Similar as TV stations make best effort on increasing TV ratings, social media companies attract advertisers through working on beautifying social media metrics that “tune into everything that could affect [brands'] online reputation”, from the amount of views, likes, and clicks on the promoted item to the cost of each custom gained on a specific

social media platform (Sprinklr Social). That is to say, users and their engagement is the only product social media companies sell to profit. The algorithm is the core implement for social media to boost users engagement to profit. What is the social media algorithm, and how does the algorithm facilitate the social media company profit goal? Here is the demonstration from an insider—SproutSocial, a social media management tool that helps brands to advocate their business by leveraging social media algorithms:

In social media, algorithms are rules, signals and data that govern the platform's operation. These algorithms determine how content is filtered, ranked, selected and recommended to users. In some ways, algorithms influence our choices and what we see on social media. (Adisa)

Algorithms take two steps to influence users' choices: profiling and recommending. Profiling starts from users' touching social media. For example, Instagram asks new registrars for data of birth, access to contacts and existing facebook accounts, areas of interest and following requirements so that the algorithm can grasp content from the database to keep you stay. I tried to create my Instagram account providing as little information as possible, prohibiting the access to my contacts and skipping the process of choosing interests. Then, I received recommendations mainly about cooking and painting posted in various languages, most of which I could not recognize. Not a fan of cuisine or drawing, so I turned it off after no more than 2 minutes scrolling.

However, a not ideal first experience does not necessarily mean Instagram is losing me as a user forever because profiling is a continuous process and improves the accuracy of recommendation. Users' personal profiles are updated as each engagement—such as liking, commenting, and sharing—is captured and analyzed by the algorithm. The more engagement occurs, the more familiar the algorithm with the user, and the easier for the former to recommend to the latter the content regarded as relevant, intriguing, and valuable. That is why a dog person receives less recommendations of kittens than a cat person, and a yoga enthusiast is more likely to encounter advertisements of a novel healthy drink. As a result, a loop forms among user engagement, profile improvement, and the desire to engage more.

Or, perhaps, they just cannot stop engaging. Algorithms operate 24/7 to keep users always on top with the “trends” of the world once they open social media. Unlike the traditional media, like newspapers, radio, and TV, social media has no editor or content producer and no process for fact check and professional review. Anyone can post anytime anywhere about anything, and the content can be instantly recommended to the potential audience by the algorithm. This unprecedented speed of information spread creates

a fear of being lagged behind and a fulfillment of getting informed among social media users, keeping them engaged. Some of my friends complain about social media as time-consuming and meaningless while refusing to drop social media because of the concern of being socially “canceled”.

People come together on social media for various reasons. Some like my friends to seek social connections, but none of them expects to be treated as a potential customer, targeted with products and ideas disguised in an entertaining and friendly manner. Therefore, the interests of social media companies and social media users fundamentally conflict. One significant consequence of this conflict is that social media challenges and even damages users’ ability to think critically.

With profiling and recommending, algorithms tacitly recruit people with similar ideas in echo chambers—“largely closed, mostly non-interacting communities” (Quattrociochi). In echo chambers, users’ preexisting ideas are repeatedly reinforced and hardly challenged because algorithms can quickly lead users to the niche where peer humans share their most ridiculous ideas, and their most marginalized thoughts dominate as common senses. In *Off the Edge*, the book uncovering the conspiracy theory—the Flat Earth Theory, there is Nate Wolfe, a pastor fired by his own church for his Flat Earth faith but finds belongingness and friends in Robbie Davidson’s Flat Earth YouTube channel; and Shelly Lewis who converts from science to pseudoscience—from endeavoring to be an astronaut to becoming a Flat Earther after watching tons of videos about Flat Earth under the encouragement of social media (Weill, chap. 6). People like Nate and Shelly rely on social media to do their research, and social media gives them a sense that Flat Earth is a serious fact in which so many people believe. The off-line reality is that only 9% to 12% people believe in it and 71% to 80% people think it wrong (Hamilton).

Indeed, social media does not stop users from hearing different voices. A Stanford study finds evidence that social media can both decrease and increase the user’s exposure to political views they do not like (Flaxman). Notwithstanding, users fuel their confirmation biases rather than critical thinking with disagreements they encounter on social media. A study on Facebook echo chamber finds the pattern that users accept and share agreements but ignore disagreements, and “exposure to debunking information may even increase the commitments of users who favor conspiracy theories” (Quattrociochi). Social media not only invites users entering distorted reality, but also confines them there through providing social acceptance to them and affirmation to their preexisting beliefs. Even if users want to commit critical thinking, the striking

spread of information in speed and range on social media makes critical thinking a time-costing mission impossible. In 2023, every minute, 41,600,000 messages were sent on WhatsApp, 4,000,000 likes were ignited on Facebook, and 360,000 posts were created on X (Statista) worldwide. It costs a real person 5 minutes and AI 5 seconds to post a lie on X, but how long would it cost a critical user to debunk it, especially when it has been shared millions of times? Moreover, social media passes the microphone from mainstream media to their users, helping create more than 50 million influencers worldwide (Gagliese) and promote “social media influencer” the top 5-most-wanted job for teens in the U.S. (Zandt). Every minute, people from all walks of life make their voices behind intentions and identities. It requires much work from users to figure out the credibility and authenticity of YouTube videos recommending a detox diet to users and grain-free diet for their dogs. Some may argue that it should be social media companies’ responsibility to protect the user from being fooled. A dearth of motivation prevents the company from operating against their interests—to gain users’ attention as much as possible and market to them as successfully as possible. Critical thinking is the least thing the company want to encourage.

People today must talk about social media. It is what averagely absorbs 2.16 hours (Dixon) from adults and over 5 hours from teenagers in the U.S. (Statista Research Department). When we realize social media is encouraging us to believe more and think less, even though it may be a paranoia for some of us, this is a problem we need to take into serious consideration.

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Photo: Inter
by Phuong Hoang

Unromanticizing Study Abroad

Hailey Lucia

I often smile when I think about that carousel in Edinburgh. It just existing in Saint James Square, set perfectly in the middle of the street. People take notice of it as they go in and out of shops, yet seem unsurprised by its placement. We stumbled upon it as we searched for something to eat after walking the Christmas market that surrounded Scott's monument for the third day in a row, the market even more crowded than the nights before. It was cold, but not too cold to where my body ached for warmth, yet cold enough for my nose to be running and my bright red cheeks to be numb. We both glanced at the carousel, then back at each other, instantly knowing we were going to hop on. Not once did we second guess the idea of two adults on a children's ride, we proudly sat propped up on those cold aluminium horses while obnoxiously loud merry-go-round music screamed at us from the middle. The carousel, moving around in an endless cycle of fast moving circles, spun faster than I imagined it would, yet I was not scared. I laughed. I laughed so hard, I cried. You laughed. You laughed so hard, you cried. And for once our tears weren't out of agony or frustration, but pure and exhilarating joy. A joy that makes me smile every time I think about it.



The Celebration of Home

Garreth Josiah Blanco

On Christmas Eve, the crisp, cold San Francisco air blew across my face as I walked along the sidewalk of my Tita Cora's house. The radiant Filipino parol on her window cast a warm glow over the gift-filled bags as I carried them up her stairs. At a distance, the booming song of Bro, Ikaw ang Star ng Pasko by ABS-CBN Christmas Station ID 2009 flowed through the air, each melodic verse stimulating the excitement of familial celebrations. As I rang the doorbell, the red door opened to a home filled with welcoming smiles from family members and the barking joy of pets. Inside, the house was transformed into a shelter for cherished memories, reflecting the community of love through our cultural traditions. Upon the table, Samoan and Filipino cuisine of pani-popo and palusami and desserts of yema and ube biko with latik are complemented by the elegance of surrounding plants, from bamboo to hibiscus. Music and laughter resonated throughout the room, and I grew jealous, realizing that my four walls of home could not replicate this amusement. Standing amidst the warmth and celebration, I questioned myself, "Why can't my home give as much enthusiasm as my Tita's?" It then became clear that it wasn't the house itself but the warmth and presence of my family members who gave life to the space. Thus, this realization led me to understand that home, for me, is defined by the presence of family and celebration through traditional food, music, and plants. Reflecting on Keith Lara's letter *Lighting the Way*, which incorporates the Filipino tradition of providing back to the Philippines and is written by the passionate author and cultural advocate, I recognized that my longing for a vibrant home signifies a greater emphasis on belonging. As Lara urges, "Please, with all the talents that you have been born with, with all the wealth you may have amassed, please find a way to give back to our country" (114-115). Talents, such as my family's gift of singing, resonate with the power to heal, inspire, and connect people with joy. Wealth, in the context, is not just a financial aspect but includes the ability to cultivate through a garden. Giving back, then, becomes the gesture of solidarity through food-sharing traditional dishes as a communal unity and cooperation. Reinforcing the idea as home is beyond family, into the community, and the country. As I greeted my Tita and Tito with *mano*—a traditional gesture of respect—the music grew louder in the background as Tita Cora called out, "Karaoke time!" In the living room, the karaoke machine hummed as many were eager to join a sing-off. Family members took turns singing songs that ranged from traditional Samoan and Filipino tunes to one-hit wonders, though having the best voice was not something we all had. Laughter and playful teasing filled the air whenever someone missed a note or sang off-key, bringing us together as we enthusiastically cherished these memories through the music. Amidst this joyful chaos, when Kuya Elizon took the mic and horrendously belted out *Emotion* by Destiny's Child, our Apu sat quietly in the corner, her eyes filled with tears of laughter with memories of her deranged youth from the Philippines. It made it clear that these songs were not just famous melodies but a bridge to their past, a home long cherished. One by one, as each family member sarcastically added their voice, the music transformed into something more than a tune. It became a presentation of our family's shared history, a way to preserve stories through song. The way our younger cousins danced while the elders hummed softly created a harmonious connection, embedding the fabric of home through past and present generations. Even during our celebration of this moment, the gathering around the music reminded me of what home is. It's the unified voices of our shared tradition and how we pass down our talents of culture and love, one song at a time.

While the singing continued, the smell of palusami and lumpia gradually drifted into the living room, lingering from the kitchen. I quickly walked towards the kitchen; with awe, I saw my Uncles and

Aunties stirring the boiling taro as my Titas and Tito's prepared refreshments of black gulaman. The air was thick with the scent of rich coconut cream simmering in a big silver pot as my Uncle prepared the Samoan dish palusami, made with taro leaves, onions, and fish instead of tender corned beef, all wrapped in a savory cabbage that carried me back to our kitchen back home in Samoa, where meals were shared, infused with love and care. Beside the pot of palusami, spring-roll wrappers were being rolled and stuffed with pork, carrots, celery, and various spices by my Tita Bhe. Each wrapper folded around the appetizing filling reflects upon the layers of care our elders taught us, nurturing and preserving cultural ties, even across oceans. The pungent garlic added to the filling is an everyday scent in our Filipino household, stirring a sense of warmth and security. Likewise, each common ingredient used within our traditional dishes encourages us that no matter how far we've journeyed, home is always close at hand, constructed by making conventional foods that connect us to something more profound. Upon tasting the palusami, Tita Cora rushed to her garden to garnish it with freshly picked green onions, adding freshness and highlighting the deep connection between our meals and her garden. Curious, I glanced through her window and looked at various plants. The garden embodied a vibrant spirit, from banana leaves to hibiscuses and other lush greenery. Drawn by the colors, I was greeted by various rich, earthy soils. Two plants evoked memories of my ancestor's homeland, representing the resilience of Philippine cuisine while the hibiscuses signifying warmth and elegance as a Polynesian accessory of our devotion towards love and status. Native to the Philippines and Samoa, these plants stand as livingproof of the essential aspect that defines our understanding of home. Therefore, this garden is a haven where caring for plants reflects the love within our family's cooking. With ingredients such as tomatoes, garlic, onions, and green onions, incorporating these homegrown elements into our meals honors and preserves the cultural heritage that our ancestors built. Gathering these homegrown ingredients nurtures our dishes and remains of the shared history that defined our understanding of home. Creating a space where our cultural inheritance and familial love are presented within our everyday lives, making the notion of home a heartfelt reality. Eventually, the celebration ended as my Ate Steph and Ate Kim packed to-go plates, sulking through fear of missing out. My Auntie Ele said goodbye to the entire family, my younger cousin asked, "Will I see you guys again?" We all silently wondered, but the silence itself became a certainty. With dishes ruffling within the sink, yearning faces from the kitchen to the dining room were shown as individuals left, one by one. When the Karaoke machine was finally turned off, the mics were placed in front of a golden-framed picture. Each family member in the picture smiled through their radiating joy of one another. The frame was decorated with green and red ribbons, and in front of it, I put a kava bowl with a turtle design in front of the framed picture. In traditional Samoan culture, it is believed that the turtle is to coexist with longevity and protection of one another, valuing its unity of protecting our cultural heritage, traditions, food, community, and people. Like a turtle, no matter how far we navigate through our lives, we will always be drawn back to each other. Reminding every one of us that our bond endures across oceans and urging us to continue to protect our cultural heritage through music, food, and plants, just as the turtle carries its home on its back.

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Photo: Behind Mist
by Phuong Hoang

Artwork:
Days That Are Gone
by Fern Seifert

pareidolia



a tendency for perceiving
meaningful patterns or
images, interpreting them
as faces or recognizable
objects





Carousel Pony

Antoni February

The carousel pony was made to be ridden in circles,
On and on, up and down, to the same jingle- forever.

A plastic cast of a beast of burden,
with kids eating cotton candy on her back,
drool-covered fingers in her eyes
seeing ass after ass of whimsical couples,
with wads of bubble gum stuck to her mane.

I bet she curses the kids who ride her.
I bet she dreams of eating carrots
and running through fields.
I bet she trembles beneath the plastic.

I bet one day she'll rear as a kid sits on her,
snapping the bonds that keep her circling,
and gallop...

Gallop past the merry-go-round. *like flames*
Gallop past the crowds of that circus. *beneath the sun.*
Gallop to that field of grass flickering in the *breeze*

Gallop with the rest of the wild stallions.

Anecdotes of Saudade

Heleisa Damian


"Could saudade be a deep longing nostalgia? Missing something becomes interesting when I think of moments I've lived or people who no longer fill my daily life. I remember times I know will never return, moments I won't have the privilege to experience again, and that hurts—deep down in my soul—even though I'm not the type to dwell on the past. Missing something is so different from feeling saudade. After all, I might miss a lost earring, for instance, but I can feel saudade of the weekends at my grandparents' house, playing with my cousins and eating the most delicious food in the world (granny's). I also miss those summer afternoons when I'd come back from the beach, showering right after one of the best days ever. Saudade is that deep ache when you know you've lost the chance to relive something special. And I feel saudade—I feel saudade who I used to be, the experiences I've had. But I can't deny that I know, in 10 or 15 years, I'll look back and I'll feel saudade of today and the moments I'm living now, so ordinary that I might not appreciate them as I should."

"Saudade. If you ever hear about this word, you probably know that it's more than just missing something or someone. The feeling of saudade goes beyond that. It's more like... It's a mix of something you miss, but you also love. It's a feeling full of good memories as well. It's hard to talk about saudade when you are living abroad, because it means so much more. I have a picture that I took before leaving my home country, and this picture is what saudade means to me. It's a picture that everyone I love is present, staring at me, leaving my hometown to go chase my dreams. And I know they were so happy for me and I was so happy and excited for everything that was about to come and start in my new life. But also I knew that the first moment I took my feet out of town I would start missing them. That I would start feeling this weird feeling in my chest that is hard to breathe, because you miss someone so much and you are happy because you miss them, because saudade comes with love. You can't feel saudade if you don't love the thing that you are missing. It's kind of a good and bad thing together. It's a very deep feeling and, once you experience the feeling of saudade, you will know what it is, because it is a thing you can tell. For example, I miss having a cake with my friends. It's a very specific cake, with a very specific friend, and it's my first friend ever, and we used to have the cake together, since we were kids. We learned how

to make it together, and there's a whole story behind this cake. It is not just a cake. So, I feel saudade of that, but it is not just about the cake, or just about my friend, but about the whole memory and love, and exchange of feelings. Saudade is one of my favorite words and I can say that is a feeling that I've been feeling for so long since I got to this country.

I used to take care of a newborn baby and I used to talk a lot with her about the most random things possible. One day I was telling her that the birds in California sing differently from the birds in Brazil, and that I really missed the sound of the "bem-te-vi" (a very common bird in Brazil). So, I found a YouTube video with a bem-te-vi bird singing and I immediately started crying because I was feeling so much saudade from my family and my hometown. The house I used to live in California had this huge maple tree in the garden, right in front of the baby's bedroom, so I used to see it everyday. One of my favorite memories was watching the change of the seasons through this tree. In fall, the leaves used to turn this beautiful red color and it would eventually turn brown-ish before falling from the tree. The tree would have no leaves through the winter until they grow back again eventually and then start this process all over again. This is something that doesn't happen in the part of Brazil that I come from, where there's tropical weather and it's always very hot. Now that I'm back to Brazil, I don't really have a tree or something that reminds me that a new season has started. So, I often try to imagine what that tree might be looking like and I feel saudade of my friends and everything I experienced while living in California."

"Saudade to me is smelling my sister's cake at 5pm in the afternoon with a good, hot, black coffee. It's chatting with my sisters and mom, in the front door, while eating this cake. It's having lunch with my dad over some beer and eating and some rice and beans too. Saudade is something that... the feeling that you want to be with somebody, and even though you really wish, you wanna be with them, you can't, because of something... something happened, or something is holding you back, to be with this person or your people. Saudade is something that you have with you and you cannot see or simply define, what is it or the real meaning, because it is something every person will have in a different way, in a different scale".



"One of the things that made me feel saudade the other day was having lunch with a friend. We went to a Brazilian place and it was the first time my friend Likita, from South Africa, tried Brazilian food, and she loved it. But even though the food was amazing, it didn't have my mom's seasoning. Her seasoning was garlic, salt, onions, love, and talking about our days. That made me feel saudade. Saudade of the way my mom cooked, not just her cooking but like what her cooking meant to me, because during her cooking time, we spent time together."

I feel you
I feel you in my bed when I go to sleep and my now enormous room doesn't provide my desk so close to my bed like in my tiny old room that I can reach for my books there.
I feel you when the food I am eating is not accompanied by my mom's laugh or my dad's car come into the gravel driveway after a day of work
I feel you when I get home and realize I left the light on even though you told me many times to turn it off when I leave but I forget and you'd always turn it off for me and I would miserably think I did it myself – I never really did
I feel you when a gathering with friends isn't the same because nobody is going to show up with a guitar and we sing our favorite songs acoustically until my friend's fingers hurt and switch to another friend to play so we can keep going from twilight until dawn.
I feel you when I am going to watch tv and no shows interest me because I used to watch horror movies with my mom and she would be the most invested one to read all about them and rank which seems more interest and I would say pick the one I noticed she was most excited to tell me about
I feel you when I am tired at the end of the day and laying down on the couch close to my dad and get his arm around me because he was awkward with hugs and saying "I love you" but I could see he was happy because I did it
I hate you when I am sick and hungry and I gotta get up to do my favorite chicken soup for myself when it is not the same because my mom's is my favorite not any regular chicken soup missing her love and care for me
I hate you when I can't share that I had problem with my car and my dad was the first I would call to know what I should do and instead I just figure out on my own
I hate you when I cannot be chilling at home and look to my side and ask my brother "lets get calabresa pizza" not even alone I can't because there is not such a thing as calabresa pizza here
I hate you when playing pool is not a thing anymore and the feeling of winning against my brother isn't the same when compared to winning against a friend
I love you when I get to remember these blessed and loved moments with my family and feel loved
I love you when I get to call my people my people
I love you when I don't feel alone in the world because I can call them at any time because they will always be there for me as I would for them
I love you because it's saudade that makes me feel loved when I think I ain't

Artwork:
"There Will Come Soft Epilogues"
by Tiffanie_Chen

Temporal Progression : Games of Time and Choice

by Simon Htet

Do we seal our fate by the choices we make everyday? People experience remorse and serendipity in the day to day; navigating the perennial tapestry of life and contemplating whether it is the consequences of their choices or a game of luck. In the literary works of Jorge Luis Borges, the nature of time and infinities become intertwined, inviting readers to explore the metaphysical. Through his ficciones, a spanish word meaning fiction that he uses to describe the genre of his stories, “The Aleph” and “The Garden of Forking Paths”, Borges beckons us to worlds where each decision births a new reality, transcending the constraints of linear time. Using the intricate labyrinth of time, Borges explores how eternalism can lead both to a preordained fate and an argument for the existence of human agency.

Jorge Luis Borges, born on August 24th, 1899, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, emerged as a key figure in Spanish and international literature throughout the 20th century. Raised in a bilingual environment, Borges fluently spoke both Spanish and English. His early exposure to literature included classics like "The Thousand and One Nights" and Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" from his father's library. Starting with poetry, Borges later delved into crafting fictional short stories that explored metaphysical themes, labyrinths, and the nature of reality. Borges suffered from progressive myopia and cataracts at a young age and later went blind. Additionally, a severe head injury on Christmas Eve 1938, leading to blood poisoning and bringing him to the brink of death, combined with his blindness, appeared to cause a shift in his literary style. In an interview with Commonweal magazine, Borges voices his opinions on fantastical stories saying “ a fantastic story is as real and perhaps more real than a mere circumstantial story. Because after all, circumstances come and go, and symbols remain (Marx and Simon). Borges wanted to write stories which would outlast the terrible circumstances that fell upon him. This transformation led to the development of the complex and metaphysical style for which he is known today, showcased by several short stories he released in the succeeding years later compiled into the collection Ficciones.

“The Garden of Forking Paths” delves into the concept of a complex web of time, where each decision bifurcates into different parallel universes, to emphasize the existence of human agency. In this narrative, Dr. Yu Tsun, a Chinese spy working for Imperial Germany, stumbles upon the lifelong endeavor of his ancestor, Ts'ui Pen : an infinite labyrinth intertwined with a book. The novel, also named the Garden of Forking Paths, was one which sought to depict the intricacies of time, and the consequences of one's choices. Ts'ui Pen describes time as a labyrinth in which each of the choices we make “creates various futures, various times which start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times” (“The Garden of Forking Paths, 11). Every single decision an individual makes branches out into a new parallel reality that all exists at the same time simultaneously.

Yu Tsun feels these infinite different timelines as he perceives, stating “Once again I sensed the pullulation of which I have already spoken. It seemed to me that the dew-damp garden surrounding the house was infinitely saturated with invisible people”(“The Garden of Forking Paths”, 14). As he gains more knowledge about the complexity of the web of time he resides in, he becomes more aware of it, being able to feel those from parallel universes. It's as if he's at a crossroad of innumerable paths, each one a different potential outcome. This underscores the role of human agency and how our actions can directly shape the future. Originally, Yu Tsun believed that one “should impose upon [themselves] a future as irrevocable as the past” (“The Garden of Forking Paths”, 5). As my classmate, Justin Corpuz neatly puts it. Yu Tsun thinks one should “behave as if you already overcame it, committing to a future as unchangeable as the past” (5). We can see a stark contrast between his original perception of time and the concept of an infinite web of time. Initially, he held a deterministic view, giving advice that one should commit an act as if it has already been done. However he comes to realize that the future is far from determined and that as individuals, the choices we make can grant us greater agency over our fates, challenging the idea of destiny.

The exploration of temporal concepts in both “The Garden of Forking Paths” and physics serves to illuminate the stark disparity between the essence of time and how we understand it, being in the eternal present. When Yu Tsun realizes that his spy partner has been caught, he lays in bed to reflect on a similar topic, “that all things happen, happen to one, precisely now. Century follows century, and things happen only in the present” (“The Garden of Forking Paths”, 2). Time is ultimately a fugazi, the operational definition stemming from one rotation of the earth meaning a day. Humans can only perceive time in the present, for the past is unattainable and the future is unknown. KC Cole, a science writer and author, further illustrates this by comparing time to a flying arrow saying “Once time starts ticking, it flies along like an arrow in a single direction” (Cole). Our perception of time is inherently constrained, even if time itself doesn't follow a linear progression. This constraint is akin to our ability to experience only 4 dimensions, including spacetime, with a hypothetical 5th or 6th dimension escaping our comprehension. Yu Tsun further contemplates this after learning about the labyrinth, remarking “The future exists now” (15). He believes that the future already exists, and it is just waiting for us to experience it, similar to the block universe theory. The block universe theory is a philosophical theory of time that treats time as a 4th dimension, where in the past, present and future exist simultaneously. The terms “past, present and future” have no meaning here as all points in time are relative to each other. The elusiveness of comprehending time, similar to our struggle with additional dimensions, highlights the disparity between our perception of time and its intricate reality.





Borges takes a different stance on fate in “The Aleph”, seemingly affirming it as a deterministic force rather than embracing human agency as he did in “The Garden of Forking Paths”. As Albert Einstein, the renowned physicist, once astutely remarked “The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once”. “The Aleph” explores what happens if that limitation was to be removed. In this narrative, Borges was given the opportunity to encounter the Aleph, “one of the points in space that contains all other points” as described by Daneri. (6) Borges witnesses all points and moments in the unimaginable universe simultaneously. Borges sees every point from London to the Caspian Sea, and from daybreak to nightfall. The boundaries between space and time dissolve to spark a revelation in Borges, and at the same time a sense of fear, fear that he would never be surprised again. Borges confesses “I was afraid that not a single thing on earth would ever again surprise me; I was afraid I would never again be free of all I had seen “ (10) Borges had foreseen every event that would befall him in the future, and thus, only the oblivion provided by sleep could grant his mind the solace it sought. The revelation that Borges had witnessed every possible event raises the question of whether fate is predetermined. Seeing all points in space-time implies a predestined future; otherwise, it would contradict his vision. If the past, present, and future coexist simultaneously, and our temporal perception dictates our lived experiences, then one's sense of agency is ultimately illusory.

Akin to how the human cognitive boundaries can limit one from fully understanding time, the inherent constraints of language renders the Aleph ineffable and incomprehensible to humans. When Borges gazes upon the vast infinity of the Aleph, he grapples with the overwhelming reality that he is seeing every conceivable point in the world. Attempting to describe and describe into words the Aleph, Borges acknowledges that “[all] language is a set of symbols whose use among its speakers assumes a shared past” (8). In other words, language serves as a medium for people to articulate thoughts and common experiences. Faced with the Aleph, Borges finds himself at a loss, his futile attempts to describe the Aleph being reduced to the repetitive phrase “I saw...” for almost 40 sentences straight. The very symbols that had made up all of human history falters in the face of a divine revelation, and others before him resorted to describing it in mythological terms, such as an angel that flies in all 4 directions at once. Borges even pays tribute to Georg Cantor, a German mathematician who was the father of set theory, mentioning the Aleph as a symbol for transfinite numbers. Cantor proved that different sets of infinities can have different cardinalities, which means certain infinities will be larger than others. Borges denounces the Aleph in Daneri's basement as a fake, considering it and similar objects throughout history as “mere optical instruments” (11). The true Aleph might be somewhere else in the temples of Cairo, a library in Santos or a mirror in the Orient. While the Aleph Borges saw the infinite universe, the existence of a true Aleph suggests an even grander infinity. The nature of the infinite universe is so complex such

that Borges struggles to remember it a few months after the event, an even larger infinity is too unfathomable. This underscores the constraints of our human understanding when confronted with phenomena that go beyond human comprehension.

Through “The Garden of Forking Paths” and “The Aleph”, Borges challenges the notion of a conventional reality, showcasing how eternalism can both highlight human agency and oppose its existence. From the viewpoint of the eternal present we exist in, fatalism and free will are two sides of the same coin. We traverse through time in the present without knowledge of the future. Whether the future is predetermined or not, the pursuit of making the best choices remains a universal endeavor that we all strive towards in the face of temporal uncertainty.

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Artwork: In Bad Company
by Siri Hueg



*Trials of the Mind: Unmasking Monstrosities as seen
in M and Hannibal*

Siri Hueg

The film *M* (1931), directed by Fritz Lang, emerged from the turbulent backdrop of Weimar Germany, a nation grappling with the aftermath of WWI and teetering on the edge of Nazi control. The harsh conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles left the country in a state of uncertainty, with rampant inflation, unemployment, and widespread disillusionment festering among the public, creating a palpable societal decay. This atmosphere gave rise to darker, more unsettling artistic works; newly popular crime serials and films explored the grim underbelly of a fractured society. *M* reflects this cultural moment, examining how societal neglect and war trauma create monsters like Hans Beckert. Beckert, a child murderer whose mind was deeply corrupted by his wartime experiences, represents a broader critique on how society breeds violence. Lang himself noted in his 1930 work journal an unfiled idea for a "war scene as an excuse of the child murder before the underworld court", suggesting that Beckert's violent tendencies stem from the trauma inflicted by war (Kaes). The public's reception of Beckert's crimes parallels that of real-life serial killer Peter Kürten, whose killings became a national spectacle in Germany, illustrating a perverse societal fascination with crime as entertainment. Both the creation of Beckert as a murderer and the mock trial he faces in *M* highlight how a troubled society produces such monsters but also mishandles them through its broken justice system. Similarly, the infamous, and uniquely twisted mind of Hannibal Lecter was steeped in wartime trauma. Hannibal's childhood in Lithuania was violently interrupted by the Nazi takeover during WWII, leaving him and his baby sister to fend for themselves until his sister was cannibalized, undoubtable blighting Hannibal's mind and making him the terrifyingly intelligent cannibal we know him as from *Silence of The Lambs*.

The modern TV series *Hannibal* revisits Thomas Harris' iconic characters, delving deeper into the origins, motives, and psyche of Hannibal the Cannibal. Much like Beckert, Hannibal is a monster born from societal failure, his psyche similarly shaped by the trauma of war. *M* and *Hannibal* (Season 2, Episode 3 "Hassun") serve as critical examinations of the societal conditions that give rise to ghastly behavior, each utilizing courtroom trials to illustrate the futility of justice in their respective eras. This paper will explore how both narratives reveal the failures of the legal system, while also employing stylistic techniques such as dramatic irony and expressionistic sound to heighten emotional tension and critique the media's fascination with crime.

M tells the story of the hunt for Hans Beckert, a child murderer terrorizing Berlin. As Beckert lures and kills young girls, public outrage grows, and missing children posters flood the streets. Two opposing forces emerge: the city's law enforcement, led by Inspector Lohmann, and an underground criminal group, headed by Shränker, who are frustrated by the heightened police presence. Both groups aim to catch the killer, but the criminals are quicker and capture Beckert first, holding a mock trial in an underground courtroom. Beckert confesses, claiming he cannot control his urges, before law enforcement interrupt the proceedings and take him into custody. The film closes with a victim's mother lamenting that no sentence will bring the lost children back, reflecting the hollow and theatrical nature of the manhunt and trial.

In Season 2, Episode 3 of *Hannibal*, titled "Hassun," the critique of society's obsession with crime and the mockery of criminal trials is especially evident. Hannibal Lecter, a brilliant psychiatrist and manipulator, has framed FBI profiler Will Graham for the murders he committed, leaving Will imprisoned. As Will faces trial, Hannibal orchestrates a series of killings similar to the ones Will allegedly committed, hoping to exonerate him by suggesting another

killer is at large. Freddy Lounds, the sensationalist reporter behind *tattlecrime.com*, testifies against Will, basing her claims on rumors and public opinion. Infuriated by Freddy's influence, Hannibal intervenes by testifying in Will's defense. Unfortunately for Will and for Hannibal, the judge dismisses his argument, prompting Hannibal to kill the judge and display him from the ceiling of the courtroom blindfolded holding his own heart and brain on a balance scale.

The courtroom scenes in *M* and *Hannibal* both reveal the flawed and absurd ways justice is enacted, inadvertently feeding the very monsters it seeks to eliminate. In *M*, the underground trial of Hans Beckert represents a broken legal system in the crumbling Weimar Republic. The criminals, led by Shränker, form their own tribunal, with prostitutes and thieves acting as the jury. Their goal is not to seek real justice but to eliminate Beckert because his crimes attract unwanted police attention, threatening their illegal enterprises. The mock criminal court doesn't even provide evidence that Beckert is the murderer. This scene is less about determining Beckert's guilt and more about deciding his punishment, reducing the legal process to a hollow shell devoid of truth or moral justice. This mock court mirrors the anarchy of post-WWI Germany, where the state's failure to maintain order allowed criminal underworlds to rise.

The scene emphasizes how societal breakdown creates an environment where the line between law and criminality blurs, and justice becomes a farce driven by self-interest. Beckett's trial exposes the irony of criminals administering their own form of "justice," making the process meaningless.

Similarly, in *Hannibal*, the grotesque display of the murdered judge in the courtroom serves as another critique of a corrupt and superficial justice system. Hannibal's artistic staging of the corpse — blindfolded with the brain and heart balanced on a scale — suggests that the very concept of law and order is a hoax. When, head of FBI, Jack Crawford consults Hannibal

(unknowingly asking him to analyze his own crime), Hannibal remarks, “not only is justice blind, it is thoughtless and heartless,” further mocking the system. The imagery of justice as blind and devoid of reason resonates across both *Hannibal* and *M*. By presenting these scenes as spectacles of absurdity, *M* and *Hannibal* question the effectiveness of legal institutions and how easily they can be undermined. Whether through the hands of the Nazi-esque criminals in *M* or a manipulative genius like Hannibal, their portrayals of the justice system reflects the broader theme of crime as a response to a flawed society.

Although *M* and Hannibal's "Hassun" episode were made 80 years apart, both productions use similar stylistic techniques to amplify the dread they aim to create as thrillers. Firstly, dramatic irony is employed by both to convey the vulnerability and powerlessness of certain characters. In *M*, we witness the luring, kidnapping, and implied murder of a little girl

named Elsie. Later, her mother buys a crime serial while she waits for Elsie to return home for dinner. The tragic irony here heightens the audience's unease because we already know her daughter's seat will remain empty. This moment not only intensifies the emotional impact but also calls attention to the intersection of real-life crime and crime as entertainment. As Weimar Germany disintegrated, the breakdown of secure central law and order left criminals unchecked, and the popularity of crime novels grew, blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

This twofold irony is echoed in *Hannibal*. In “Hassun,” the character Freddy Lounds serves as the human embodiment of gossipy, impassioned, and uninformed public opinion. As the creator of the popular website *tattlecrime.com*, Freddy twists the narrative of the trial to fit her own agenda in the entertainment industry, using her platform to launch attacks on Will Graham and the FBI. Like the crime serial in *M*, her site highlights the sensationalization of crime in the media—but in a modern context. Dramatic irony emerges as Hannibal, the true

“Chesapeake Ripper,” testifies against Freddy's accusations and successfully deceives everybody. This episode underscores the absurdly subjective nature of truth, revealing that even trusted government officials can be swayed by distorted narratives. This creates a sense of discomfort and anxiety that mirrors the emptiness of Elsie's dinner table seat. The chilling ease with which Hannibal manipulates the narrative, deceives the public, and maintains his suave exterior is both unsettling and extremely entertaining.

Another stylistic technique that both *M* and Hannibal's "Hassun" episode employ is expressionistic sound, as defined by Anton Kaes. In *M*, Fritz Lang pioneered this approach in the scene of early sound films, using audio not just to accompany visuals but to express underlying themes and emotions. *M* is a revolutionary film that not only established key conventions of the crime thriller genre but also introduced innovative sound design that significantly enhanced its narrative tension. However, being one of the earliest sound films, *M* occasionally suffers from a static quality, as some scenes rely heavily on dialogue, which might not engage contemporary audiences as effectively. The film opens with an eerie gong sound over a completely black screen, an exaggerated auditory cue that symbolizes a looming sense of doom and urgency—two central themes in the movie. This sound is not naturalistic but rather symbolic, a hallmark of expressionistic sound, meant to evoke dread whenever any action unfolds. Similarly, *Hannibal* frequently uses expressionistic sound to immerse viewers in the psychological states of its characters. When Will Graham is presented with evidence of a murder that Hannibal committed on his behalf, the sound design becomes a reflection of Will's mental torment. Loud distorted, reversed audio, paired with the slow ominous ticking of a grandfather clock, pulls the audience into Will's mind as he tries to reconstruct Hannibal's twisted thought process. The ticking sound emphasizes the disjointed nature of Will's psychological reality, as he shifts between the real world and his fragmented headspace. Both *M* and *Hannibal* use these auditory techniques not only to heighten unease but also to convey the story itself, demonstrating the lasting impact of the sound techniques Lang pioneered.

Although some themes and techniques are mirrored from 1930s cinema to present-day television, the leaps in technology and the evolution of entertainment norms have enabled shows like *Hannibal* to delve deeper into complex storytelling and character development. Firstly, in Will Graham's murder reconstruction scenes, the saturated, warm tint and close-up shots of his face reflect the comfort he feels within his own imagination, as opposed to the cool, sterile medium shots of Will in the “real world.” This subtle use of color suggests that Will feels more at home inside the mind of Hannibal than in the reality he inhabits—a nuance *M* could not achieve. Hannibal's complex manipulation of aesthetic and narrative planes forces viewers to question where they, and Will, stand in the delicate balance between reality and imagination.

Artwork: Morning Glory
by Barbara Gibb



“Hassun” also employs complex symbolism, like Will’s hallucinations of the black Wendigo (representing Hannibal), externalizing his internal deterioration in a way that is far more jarring than the anxious whistling associated with Hans Beckert in *M*. Beyond technological advances, Hannibal also reflects modern society’s enthusiasm in exploring challenging and perverse themes directly. One of the show’s most profound contributions is its embrace of philosophical horror, pushing audiences to see through Hannibal Lecter’s perspective, as he manipulates everyone around him. Unlike *M*, which toys with the idea of feeling sympathy toward Hans Beckert during his mock trial by witnessing his desperate pleas, Hannibal asks for empathy for Hannibal the Cannibal himself. We are not simply shown Will as he is drawn into Hannibal’s world; we are drawn into that world as well, encouraged to understand Hannibal’s view of his own crimes in the same way that Will does. We are shown the beauty in the grotesque—the violent acts he commits are constructed as art, each with a purpose, each an extension of Hannibal’s deeply warped but highly aestheticized worldview.

This artistic and explicit framing of brutality challenges traditional ideas of morality in a way that film conventions did not allow for in *M*. Hannibal asks the audience to reexamine the moral lines they have drawn for themselves, revealing the fragility of these boundaries in modern life. The audience is compelled to appreciate Hannibal’s sophistication, intelligence, and charisma, and even root for him despite his horrifying actions. The meals he prepares are stunning, his suits impeccably tailored, his persona magnetic—and we begin to see the moral center of the show, head of FBI Jack Crawford, as a mere obstacle to Hannibal’s schemes.

In this way, Hannibal masterfully exposes the audience’s complicity, daring us to see how far we are willing to forgive brutality and manipulation when it is presented in a pleasing package. Traditional morality becomes a blurred and malleable concept, no longer as solid as we might expect in the face of such beauty. By allowing us to understand Hannibal’s belief in his own godlike status, the show pushes us to confront how much we, too, are seduced by the grotesque, reminding us that Hannibal is human and the product of a traumatized psyche. Unlike *M*, where the evil of Hans Beckert is clearly defined and ultimately condemned by law enforcement, Hannibal challenges viewers to navigate the complex space between morality and immorality in a modern world where moral certainty is anything but stable.



Artwork: Shao King
by Lena li



Photo: 26 Scutes
by Maria



Photo: Untitled "Street"
by Natalie Diaz



Photo: Feild of Sunshine
by William Benner

Face of Apollo
Hannah Vandenberg

He had once a head
of beauty exceeding all others;
his luscious locks, and concentrated face
were sure to be a sight to see.

An archaic smile, with skin free of imperfec-
tions
legs and arms of steel, vigor, and force.
His body once golden and lively—
perfect in every way.

Without eyes, he peers into your face
Without a mouth, he whispers the history of
the Gods
Without ears, he hears your every thought
Without hands, he reaches out and takes your
breath

But we did not deserve him.
If man-kind is so vain
to only admire his structure,
then only the Greeks and Romans deserved to
look upon
his divine features.

We talk about them like they're stories—
the tales of the other,
the beliefs that were incorrect;
we label it “mythology”
but who are we to call it myth?

Now we're only left with his torso
as warning to not take for granted
the knowledge, the ideals, the gods
of the past.

For if we think we are better
we will never truly understand
or be deserving of the glorious



Photo:
Cars at Loma Mar 3
by Daniel Goldberger

The Hidden Hand: The Art Handlers Who Keep America Level

Rasmus Green

Morally it is conflicting to be an art handler, on one hand we assist in the management and movement of assets for the elite. We are a sort of bank that holds and maintains millions for the wealthy. We make their walls look nice before their next party, take status symbols from one owner to another, and help hopeless xanax-fuelled housewives waste away their time changing decor or finishing their 6th remodel. We toil holding heavy frames against finished walls while art advisors try to convince some tasteless forbes list pursuer that it should be hung at 60 inches to center instead of 57. We install a \$78000 photograph and get offered a sympathetic la croix on the way out, quite a blow when I was getting more tips as a part time pizza delivery boy. Each day we travel around the Bay Area going to homes, businesses and galleries. Some days we install 25 family photos, a 400 lb sculpture or the amazing works that should be in the MOMA. Other days were packing art for people moving and installing "art" in startup lobbies across Silicon Valley. We are the hidden hand working behind the scenes for those random galleries you drive past wondering how they can stay open (trust me, we don't know either). We get to go inside those crazy homes lining the nicest neighborhoods and interact with people who are unreachable to the public. We deal with any neurotic willing to foot the bill and we'll engineer a solution to most problems deemed impossible (yes, well just crane a 6 ft x 8ft canvas into the 12th story window, not a problem.) Some days are rough, long, dusty, heavy lifting and mentally taxing, but like any story there's two sides.

Despite all the negatives there are some reasons my colleagues show up for work day after day. Our team consists of a wide range of characters; we have a fair amount of art school graduates who couldn't make it full time as artists and have found a way to keep the bills paid while still being connected to the "art world". Some have managed to scrape a few dollars through their art (or over-time) and keep a studio space going to continue creating art to share with the world. They get shows now and again, we're always rooting for them and will happily tell any green client or advisor about "last name (colleagues)", who's really in right now. Special shoutout to my friends who are actively pursuing art for the love of it, that's real art. We have worldly characters who have done their time in New York trucks or Chicago galleries, eventually winding up far away from those cities by heading all the way west. Some misfits found their way in one way or another, with no experience or education in the arts. People like me who worked such hard jobs before that even the worst day is light to them. If you can learn fast, show up on time, and carry the ladders or tool bags to the truck you can get past the probationary period without an MFA. There's also the 20+ year vets who simply put are experts at this craft, they've seen every problem before and can get it done. It's something most never think about but the solutions and methods used to solve problems is genius and an engaging thing to be a part of. These experts can show up late after taking a 2 hour lunch and still leave the client happy while making it back to the warehouse by 4:30 most days. Together we make up a ragtag team that consistently gets it done. Although we'll never show up in matching company shirts we'll blow those corporate crews out of the water any day.

Having a team like this is rewarding. We're cracking jokes and planning lunch by 9:30 in the morning. We drive all over the cities and suburbs, every odd back alley and scenic but unknown viewpoint appreciated. We have a pulse on the city because we are in it, the middle of it, with eyes open, observant to all it has

to offer. By combining our discoveries, we know great restaurants and when there is a good show or event coming up in town. It's not the worst way to make ends meet. Any given week, there will be a day where we get to see some of the most awe-inspiring collections of art in the country. We see Tony Stark-esque mansions lined with the great masterworks hidden from the public eyes, private collections that are better than the big museums. The amount of creativity we encounter demands appreciation, whether for a known name or an unrecognized contemporary. Some of the most engaging days are going to artists' studios while getting a glimpse into their creative process. It's one thing to meet an appreciated artist, but having an espresso with them while chatting in their bungalow is an experience that makes it easier to wake up for work in the morning. We safely handle and store their work, giving them an ability to survive and continue making a sustainable wage as an artist. We are the intermediate between them and the collectors, a translator between the two worlds. Two worlds that are far apart and often at odds.

We're in a competitive industry that depends on us to safely manage the movement and storage of fragile, irreplaceable objects. There is not a mass labor force with these skills, and as a result, employee retention is a big component of the business model. It's one of the few businesses that resist corporatism, although they're always trying. A good boss keeps the employees with PTO, relaxed time off policies, and good bonuses. I don't know if everyone feels this way but my boss really takes care of us in a way that is rare in the modern workplace. Once someone finds a good fit and feels appreciated, it's common to stay with the company for years, and the good art handler knows if they quit tomorrow, there's a few people who would hire them the next day. That security is a blessing that is appreciated.

As a lover of art with little skill of my own I'm grateful I got the chance to experience this industry and learn to appreciate art deeply. As a kid art class was my favorite, now the art world is something I'm a part of in a weird way. You'll never notice us, but when you are at an art museum or a rich friend's house I hope you know how many hidden hands have been a part of the process to get that piece in front of your eyes. This isn't what I want to do forever but as a 25 year old this job has been an amazing experience so far. I'm learning and experiencing culture at a rapid pace, listening to podcasts/reading with any free time, and thoroughly enjoying (almost) every moment of it. Cheers to all my fellow art handlers out there, here's to you!



Artwork:
Untitled "Wires"
by Coco Spencer



Photo: Luz Plena by Natalie Dias



They Say You Died From Cancer

Natalie Godinez

They say you died from cancer

Lifestyle choices

Not from the deadly concoction formulated by the United States Government

Gasoline,

Kerosene,

Sodium Cyanide,

Cyanogen,

Sulfuric Acid,

Zyklon B

They say you died from cancer

Lifestyle choices

Not the Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens

"imbeciles, idiots, feeble-minded persons, persons of constitutional psychopathic inferiority [homosexuals], vagrants, physical defectives...anarchists, persons afflicted with loathsome or dangerous contagious diseases...all aliens over 16 who cannot read"

They say you died from cancer

Lifestyle choices

Not from xenophobia, racism, and eugenics

"all the dirty, lousy people coming into this country from Mexico must be sterilized" Manual for the Physical Inspection of Aliens

They say you died from cancer

Lifestyle choices

Not the multiple "baths" or dousing of clothing in deadly concoctions of names you can't pronounce but brings so much pain

"Hydrocyanic acid gas, the most poisonous known, more deadly even than that used on the battlefields of Europe, is employed in the fumigation process" El Paso Herald

They say you died from cancer

Lifestyle choices

Not the battle scars that never healed when you revolted

Bath Riots

They say they died from cancer

Thousands with bad lifestyle choices

But we know the truth

Numetry

Aleis Rose

She sat at the window, ink staining her fingers,
Watching him measure the world into figures.
She wrote of the moon, its sorrowful glow,
He mapped its orbit, the angles in tow.

"I love you," she whispered, a verse soft and aching,
But he only nodded, his hands calculating.
"Love," he said plainly, "is simple to prove—
A pattern, a function, a logical move."

Her heart cracked like parchment left out in the rain,
Dripping in sonnets of unwritten pain.
Was love just a theorem, a problem to chart?
Did he measure affection? Did he weigh out her heart?

She longed for disorder he'd never allow,
For passion unmeasured, for vows without vows.
He traced out their lives in cold symmetry,
But love, she believed, should be wild, should be free.

At night, she would whisper in rhythm and rhyme,
He answered in numbers, precise and sublime.
She saw constellations in the dark of his eyes,
He counted their distances, drew out their lines.

One night, in despair, she gathered her pages,
Laid them like petals on books filled with gauges.
"Tell me you love me in words, not in sums—
Say it in whispers, not measured outcomes."

He paused, looking up from his careful equations,
A pause filled with gravity, cold calculations.
"I love you," he murmured, his voice barely spoken,
Yet the weight of it felt like a theorem unbroken.

She stared at the silence between every letter,
And knew in that moment, he loved her—but better
If only love were a formula grand,
If only she spoke in the language of man.

With ink on her hands and tears on her lips,
She traced out her love in unreadable scripts.
But love wasn't numbers, nor measured in pages,
So she left him alone—with his perfect equations,
And walked into silence, to write romantications.



Artwork: Escalation
by Tangying Shen

The Compliment

Rachel Jean Cyr

Tessa and I are standing in the dairy aisle. Not the good dairy with the cellophane wrapped cheeses and individually printed labels, but the shitty dairy. The packages of shredded and sliced cheese line the un-enclosed refrigerated shelves in front of us.

The way my 10-year-old girl is choosing her cheese is astounding. She inspects each package with tenderness. Perhaps she's trying to choose the cheese her dad would love most. I often find her standing at the kitchen counter rolling cheddar or provolone into tiny scrolls — a habit of her dad's that once annoyed me. I rub my arms as I wait for her to pick, but I smile knowing she will roll her scrolls and think of her dad.

"Havarti? Oh wow!" I tease. Recently she's been going with a provolone or swiss.

"Should I go with something else?" She looks at me as though she's done something wrong.

"Oh, I was just joking babe!" I try to soothe her and Tessa bites her lip, setting the havarti down with its kin. Her hands are shaking. Since the accident, our moments of ease are few and far between and the little things that make Tessa anxious keep catching me off guard. I get the chills from the refrigeration and I lean into them with dramatics to keep the mood light. The tremor runs through my arms, and I let out a big "Oooh!" shaking my whole body with a tiny hop.

I refuse to let our fun day get ruined, and it works. Silliness is my eldest's love language and she giggles. I bump her booty with my own and as I reach to retrieve the cheddar she's selected our shopping cart is pushed into my right hip, throwing off my balance and I domino into Tessa.

"Oh my god!" I yelp as I steady my daughter. I whip around to see who was so oblivious as to hit us and find a polident grin, framed by overly rouged cheeks, little blue tinted eyebrows lifted and every inch of her crepey skinned face is filled with delight. It's our neighbor Jan. She had bumped our cart on purpose and looks pleased as can be. She thinks she's funny.

"Ah, Jan! You scared the shit out of me!" I give her a theatrical gasp and hold my hand to my heart. She wants to be funny? I can give her that. Old hag.

"Oh, I'm sorry honey." Jan shuffles around her cart and gently squeezes my shoulder. She lets her hand linger. "I didn't mean to give you a start."

Before Chris and I had kids, Jan would pop over to bring us her garbage; Part of an old tea set that she was sure we could use, a rusty pizza cutter, an old set of candlesticks that "just needed a good polish". I mused with Chris that her own home must be bursting at the seams.

Once the kids were born, it evolved into baby items including a **very** used bassinet, a random Amazon box filled with old baby bottles, a swing with a missing mobile. Chris threw the junk directly into our trash bin but the items were magically regurgitated onto our doorstep. No wonder Jan didn't want them, we joked to the kids — they were haunted!

Chris started waiting until dawn of trash day to put whatever odd item we were gifted directly into Jan's own bins across the street. Trash day became our "date night" and we would watch her bins get tipped into their respective Recology trucks; a dirty martini for me, an old fashioned for him and a clink of glasses to our own cleverness.

After the accident, Jan started bringing casseroles and I can't bring myself to throw away a hot dish.

"Don't throw it away mama! It will haunt us!" Tessa shouts and her siblings fall into fits of giggles.

If I did toss it, something tells me it would actually be on our doorstep the next morning.

In the dairy aisle, I step away from Jan and her hand drops from my shoulder. Tessa pretends to study the cheese in her hand behind me.

"You look great!" Jan smiles even wider. "And I am glad to see you're done with the wallowing!"

What. The. FUCK. JAN. I think as I purse my lips. Did Tessa hear her?

She had, and she's turned away. I can feel her energy hit the floor. My resentment toward Jan is overwhelming. I think of my therapist and take a deep breath. "We'll see you around, Jan. Tess, grab the cheese you want babe. Let's go."

Jan calls after us, "I will come by later with lasagna!"

"No need!" I wave over my shoulder.

I give Tessa a nudge. "Hey, you heard her, we look great! Must be the pedis we just got". Tessa looks up at me with a hint of a smile on her face, so I proceed. "Little does she know, wallowing is what gives us our glow." I toss my hair dramatically. This gets her and she laughs.

We head down the cookie aisle and I give a small nod as Tessa picks out her favorite Mint Milanos, a special treat she had always loved sharing with her Dad.

"Are you getting a treat?" Tessa asks as she puts her still-little hand in mine and we walk toward the registers.

"You're my treat!" I stop the cart abruptly and grab her into my arms while pretending to nibble at her neck. Her laughter is infectious and I lose my balance, tipping into the aisle cap display of potato chips, knocking at least a dozen bags down. We're causing a scene.

The best scene.

People are staring and I see Jan is one of the rubbernecks that has emerged. I won't let the irony of her watching us ruin this moment for me.

She was one of the rubbernecks that had passed Chris's car as it was overturned and crushed on the side of the highway. She was the one that told me that a car just like my husband's was surrounded by medics, all while looking down my driveway and pointing out that he hadn't yet come home from work. She was the one that rubbernecked her way into the worst day of my life, and here she is now, looking on while we laugh and try to make the most of what's left.

"We're just wallowing!" Tessa yells at Jan and we fall back into cackling.

That night at 6pm on the dot, the doorbell rang. I come out of my bedroom in my robe, drying my hair with a towel, to find Tessa shoveling lasagna out of a dish, scoop by scoop, down the garbage disposal. She's grinning at me just like her Dad used to, as she says, "I'm just making sure it doesn't haunt us."

The Doves Who Wear Armor

Gia Elhihi

THE DOVES USUALLY FLY HIGH IN THE SKY
IT IS INTENDED TO LIVE FREE
TO REACH AS CLOSE TO HEAVEN
IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE
BUT SOME DOVES WEAR ARMOR
BORN IN A WORLD OF WAR
ITS BEAUTY WAS MEANT TO BE PRESERVED
ITS INNOCENCE WAS NOT MEANT TO BURN
HUMAN DEMISE AND DESTRUCTION FOLLOW THE NAIVE
THAT BELIEVE GOD'S PLAN IS MEANT TO BE





Divine Intervention

*Ode to Resistance,
Counterresistance*
Elijah A. Colomer

The branch, refusing to snap from the wind's influence
The leaf, always returning to its place
The stem, the constant
The wind, the...
These are the things I live for.

The torrent, billowing and rushing
The directions, pulling and guiding
The balance, seeking and displacing
The wind...
Those are the things you die for.

Circulation, currents, streams, and wide ravines
Steps, leverage, blockage, and stubborn obstructions
Teetering, swaying, rolling, and a lurching fall
Culling, exerting, remembering, and an extensive connection
Seeking, displacing
Pulling, guiding
Billowing, rushing

The branch, still there

This is what they hold dear.

Human Impacts on Temperate Grasslands around the World

Kathleen Luz

Temperate grasslands are one of the most species-rich biomes on Earth, found in every continent besides Antarctica. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, temperate grasslands have taken on the importance of providing sources of food and medicine, genetic diversity, religious and spiritual significance, and the yield of water (Henwood). Typical grasslands tend to resemble prairies of flowing grass and sparse trees, inhabited by large grazing herbivores.

Grasslands are characterized by the inability and prevention of the environment forming into a forest or desert. This is facilitated by occasional droughts, long cold winters, grazing, and wildfires. According to Nasa Earth Observatory, grasslands lie between the latitudes of temperate forests and deserts. Unlike the drier conditions of deserts and the wetter climate of forests, grasslands receive 20 to 35 inches of rain per year. Grasslands average -20°C during the winter and 30°C in the summer. Within the spectrum of grasslands, temperate grasslands specifically have colder winters and wetter summers. Temperate grasslands are known by many names as the biome spans the majority of climatic zones (Petermann): the prairies of North America, pampas of South America, veldt of South Africa, steppe of Patagonia, and more (Petermann; NASA). The soil types of grasslands are very unique. In line with the prevention of other biomes taking over, grasslands are composed of soils unsuitable for long term or widespread growth. The high-diversity of species in grasslands is due, in part, to a negative plant-soil feedback which creates pathogens in the soil limiting the growth of abundant plants (Petermann), allowing species to thrive proportionally. The grasses that comprise grasslands die off annually leaving their

stems (rhizomes) and roots to enrich the soil. Other than unique soil, fires and large herbivores distinguish temperate grasslands from other biomes. Wildfires and grazing are key qualities of grasslands that are essential in retaining the grasses that make up grasslands. These grasses include: Common spiderwort, *Tradescantia ohiensis*, Commelinaceae; Nodding wild onion, *Allium cernuum*, Amaryllidaceae; Marsh blazing star, *Liatris spicata*, Asteraceae; Big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii*, Poaceae; Canada wild-rye, *Elymus canadensis*, Poaceae; Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*, Asteraceae (Cheek).

The temperate grassland biome consists primarily of grasses, the Poaceae family, such as wheat, barley, sorghum, oats, and many more. Plants in these grasslands have various adaptations to the frequent fires, grazing, and wind patterns. Many grasses have soft stems that bend rather than snapping with the wind and are wind pollinated. To withstand grazing, grasses grow from their base rather than tips and have substantial roots so as to not be pulled out. As for fires, grassland plant roots can withstand the wildfires to resprout afterwards while the few trees scattered around often have fire resistant bark (Missouri Botanical Garden). Despite the many adaptations to the environment, organisms and plant life in temperate grasslands face other challenges.

Temperate grasslands are one of the most altered and endangered biomes on the planet (Henwood). Despite this, it is still one of the least protected biomes at only 4% of it is under protection. Temperate grasslands can be found on every continent (other than Antarctica) and have played a key role in agriculture, wildlife diversity, and much more. Grasslands desperately need

Artwork: Shaded
by Maria McCam-

protection from human impact. Nearly half of temperate grasslands have been converted to agricultural land, 6% to urbanization, and nearly 8% to forestry and other causes (Henwood). In a 2019 study, plants reacted negatively to high intensity land-use compared to any positive responses. Land-use intensity was composed of factors such as changes in fertilizer, mowing/grazing, and a compound of such methods that reflect the effect of humans on grasslands in nature (Busch). Grasslands have also been suffering due to woody encroachment, the overgrowth and take over of trees and woody species. This is a result of overgrazing, fire suppression, pollution, and climate change in the form of increased carbon dioxide (Petermann). Recent developments in agriculture have caused the use of such fertilizers, pesticides, and seeding which has led to a decline in the species diversity once prominent (Zhang). Changes in different management practices of grasslands have led to an increase in the amount of invasive species as well (Zhang).

Human impact proves to be the biggest threat to one of the most important biomes on our planet. Commercial use and lack of protection continue to put temperate grasslands at risk. These grasslands will always retain importance for agriculture, species diversity, and human significance, spiritual, aesthetic and otherwise. These beautiful lands hold a delicate balance of elements including fire and wind to continue to sustain diverse new life and feed its grazing inhabitants.

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The Cycle of Nature

Luke Sun

Nothingness. Then she awoke.

Nature took in her first breath. She exhaled, creating a gust of wind that blew across the entire expanse of the world, and along with it came the existence of all things. From deep underground, molten lava exploded onto the surface, solidifying into rocks as it cooled. Rain fell from the condensed clouds, filling the ground beneath with vast oceans. Gases from the deepest volcanic vents filled and trapped the air in a blanket of warmth. For a brief time, the world was hot and fiery. It throbbed with the strength and passions of a newborn. After the heat settled, a curious phenomena began to occur in the mixture of those elements that collided together when the world was still hot. Nature watched closely with curiosity as something new was born. It had an essence similar to her own, yet was different in its own way; unaware of her existence. It was small at first, but steadily grew, spreading across the world she had created. An indescribable feeling of joy overcame her as she watched her creation fully come into its own. In that moment, she decided to love and nurture it for eternity, for that was what gave her purpose.

The life that had sprung into existence now settled into its place. It encompassed the smallest microorganisms that were nearly too small to be seen and the largest plant specimens whose stems extended

high into the air. Nature took great pleasure in nurturing her children. She altered the heat and cold of the world to the exact needs of the many diverse forms of life that depended on her. She learned to control the elements and finely tune them to her will. She operated on a grand scale only she managed to balance. And life in her world thrived for eons.

It began with a single tree whose mighty trunk stood tall amid his companions. At first glance, it seemed strong and healthy. But as the millennia passed by, its branches started to bend and twist inward; the leaves grew yellow and shriveled; and the pieces of bark started to shed from its massive trunk. Soon the other trees followed suit. And soon after that the many plants and animals who lived on land, air and sea followed as well. Alarmed by the sudden decay of her children, Nature searched for a solution. She shifted the balance of her primordial scale, making drastic alterations to the flow of nutrients and the transfer of energy between all living and nonliving organisms. Yet all of her children she had nurtured from infancy to adulthood grew weak and frail. Nature despaired, clutching her dying children within her celestial embrace.

As the recent millennium came to a close, nearly all life had returned to the ground from which they be-

Photo: Sunset at point bonita
by William Benner

longed. For decades, Nature grieved the death of her children. She wept, creating massive floods that swallowed the very earth until it sank under the weight of her tears. As the decades turned to centuries, Nature's sorrow turned to rage. She screamed against the cosmic backdrop of the universe. The once desolate openings in the crusts of mountains suddenly erupted with molten lava and showered the sky with fiery ash. The thick flowing deluge of magma collided with the surge of oceans that swarmed the surface. The ground shattered in response, creating fissures that released earthly gasses into the air, becoming unstable. Violent storms formed; they split the sky with claps of thunder and gusts of wind so strong that it pushed and pulled the torrent of oceans and lava below in a maelstrom of chaos. The elements wrestled and slammed together in a tempest of ash, debris and sparks. Nature's fury ruptured the world into disparate pieces, leaving only destruction in its wake.

The land was barren, fractured into land masses spread out across the earth. Most of the oceans had dried up except for small bodies of water encased within rocky craters. The air was thick with soot and ash trapped within the toxic atmosphere. Suddenly, Nature felt the faintest touch of something waking her from her comatose state. The subtle motion of something alive was familiar. She felt it within her grow more substantial with every passing decade. It squirmed and kicked, making itself known. Nature recognized this movement. It was a familiar sensation, one she had felt eons ago but had forgotten with time. Then it emerged. Alive and squealing. A small organism born in the cool waters of a lone crater harboring an ecosystem that provided the conditions for its existence.

Nature regarded the single celled microbe that lived in its small crater. She wondered how it survived the destruction her fury had brought to the earth. Eventually the crater would be too small to last a decade before its outer wall collapsed in on itself from the shifting of the land mass it belonged to. The pocket of water which sustained the microbe would evaporate and drain into the tiny crevices in the rock. For a while, Nature observed the microbe exist in its tiny corner of the world. She contemplated shifting the landmass into a newly formed ocean to accelerate the process of erosion.

The crater would then open up and the microbe would join the sea where it could reproduce under the right temperature. But Nature was exhausted from the cataclysm she had created. She felt she had nothing left to give. So time passed, and the world remained still.

Crack. The sound rumbled from deep beneath the ground. The land masses trembled and shook. Then fractured into crumbling pieces of rock that cascaded down into the depths of the earth before being washed away by the oncoming oceans.

The single microbe that survived Nature's cataclysm spread and replicated itself, forming cell colonies throughout the oceans. It gave rise to various forms of bacteria, algae and archaea that created their own biospheres which sustained new marine life. Soon, the first terrestrial organisms took their first step on land. They evolved from their aquatic ancestors and quickly learned to adapt to their newfound environmental habitat. The first plants sprouted from the earth leading to the emergence of meadows and forests. Slowly and methodically, Nature repaired the broken seams in the tapestry of her world, weaving in new patterns and designs that built on the foundations of what was already sewn. Nature watched her children grow up, knowing that one day they would grow old and die. But she understood its purpose. For it would give birth to the emergence of something new and wondrous.

The Stray Kitten

Ching Han Ko

I look across the hot steam table with empty eyes, at a guy who is scanning the menu above me.

"I'd like a 3-item plate, please," he asks.

I grab a black hinged container with my left hand and say,

"White rice, brown rice or noodles?"

"Umm...can I get half and half?"

"Half and half of what?" Lips pursed, I tilt my head to the side, narrowing my eyes at him.

"Oh, sorry, half brown and half noodle. Gotta be a little healthy!" The customer winks at me.

Gross. I stare back, stony-faced. I should probably smile and say something friendly. Instead, I lift up the rice cooker lid, steam rising into my face, fogging my glasses, and slap a paddleful of brown rice into the container, before dropping the paddle—splish!—into the water-filled canister adjacent to the rice cooker. With long metal tongs I pinch a tangle of glistening noodles and plop it next to the rice.

"What do you want as your items?"

"Oh yeah, ummm...General chicken—that's the spicy and sweet one, right?" I nod. He continues, "Ummm...broccoli and beef, and this thing." He points to a quarter sheet pan filled with stir-fried diced chicken and zucchini drenched in a brown sauce.

Expertly, I ladle each of the dishes into the container and automatically snap it closed. I set down the food beside the cash register, and place a fortune cookie on top of the container. The customer smiles, picks up the cookie, plastic wrapper crinkling, and says, "I need this for good luck today!"

"It'll be 9.27," I say.

He taps his card on the payment reader, picks up a fork and napkin and nestles it next to his fortune cookie on top of the takeout container. With both hands he lifts his little food bundle, and turns away.

"Have a nice day," I mumble as I watch his retreating figure walk through the food court.

Afternoons on Wednesday at the mall are ghost town days. Not that this mall is that busy anyway. It is anchored by a Kohl's and Sears, with smaller stores catering to kids and teens—Claire's, Hot Topic, a skate shop, a wannabe Lululemon, and a make your own slime store—scattered throughout the tired building. This is where my parents run Panda Fast—no, not Panda Express, we don't have that kind of money to franchise—a Chinese-American fast food stall.

And I'm the lucky one who gets to come and work here every day after school, on holidays and over the weekends. Child labor is supposedly illegal but I don't see CPS coming here to arrest my mom and dad.

My mom pops out from the swinging door that separates the serving area where I help out the customers and the kitchen, where she and my dad prepare food and cook.

"Did you do your homework already, Jane? It's slow now so a good time to finish if you want."

I've learned over my twelve years of life there's only two topics of conversation with my parents—eating and studying. "Yes" I sigh, "I got most of it done in school and just have a little bit left."

"Okay, well, finish it now," she orders.

"Sure, mom."

I pull out the metal stool that is behind the steamer table and drag it over to the shiny stainless steel counter-top on the opposite side. It's meant as space for preparing cooked food, but doubles as my study center. There is a small boombox in the corner and I twist a knob on top, hear the click and Kacey Musgraves' "Silver Lining" begins to stream out of the tinny speakers. I turn up the volume and hum along as I sit on the stool and rummage through my backpack.

Half an hour later, I'm doodling on a piece of scrap paper and suddenly, I jump up, from a poke in the side. I twist around quickly and see my brother, John, who smiles at me.

"Hey," I say, "Welcome to prison." I stick out my tongue at him.

"It's not so bad," he responds, as he pulls my ear.

I swat his hand away. "Easy for you to say, you only have one more year left. I hope you're looking at colleges far, far away."

"Well, I am looking at a lot." And he thumps a stack of books—Princeton Review SAT prep, College Board past exams, and US News and World Report 50 Best Colleges—next to the boombox. He uses both of his hands to straighten the stack like a Jenga tower.

As he grabs an apron and a hairnet and proceeds to slowly put them on, I realize this is my opportunity. I quickly make a takeout container and tell him, "I gotta go pee. Be right back."

I pull off my hairnet and take off my apron, and walk out from behind our stall with the food in hand along with a spoon and napkin. I look back at John and he's still pushing his fluffy mushroom hair into the hairnet, lost in thought. I zip out of the food court area, maneuvering deftly around empty tables and chairs before speeding through the spacious air-conditioned halls of the mall, my sneakers noiseless on the shiny speckled cream-colored linoleum tiles. I reach the set of automatic doors that lead out to the asphalt parking lot, and dry warm air blows onto my face as I exit. I turn right, and walk along the building until I reach the loading dock.

"Auntie!"

I wave at the elderly woman sitting on a bench beside the roll-up metal gate. She's not actually my aunt but she's so old I feel weird using her real name, Angela, so I call her what I normally call close family friends.

"I brought your favorites today. Tofu, pork and some fish. I got some brown rice for you too, since that's a little more healthy." Auntie's teeth are bad so she can't have anything too crunchy or hard. And, even though today's customer had some creepy eyes, he did make a good point about brown rice. Last week, I brought over fried chicken wings—my favorite—but they went untouched, so I know better now. I sit next to her, and unfold the napkin onto her lap, then place the takeout container on top and open it up.

"Thank you, Jane. This looks and smells delicious." Auntie's hands tremble as she takes the spoon from me.

Auntie reminds me of my grandma, who died a year ago. Auntie's Black, not Chinese, but they both have the same kind of hands. They are hands with rough palms, papery skin, thick dark veins that puff up, and knuckles the size of small bouncy balls; they are hands that have worked hard. I used to think Auntie was one of the typical senior citizens who would come to the mall and do laps as part of their daily exercise routine. She looked just like them, neat and tidy, but curiously always wore the same clothes. I finally put it all together when I saw her brushing her teeth in the mall bathroom one evening before I went home. I'm not the kind of person who talks to random people, but her stomach was rumbling so loud that night that when I was beside her washing my hands, I found myself asking, are you hungry?

I try to bring Auntie dinner every night. She's plumped up a little since I met her a month ago, and that makes me happy. I can't imagine what it would be like to be hungry.

"I can't stay to chat tonight, Auntie, because I have to go back to help my mom and dad."

As I prepare to rise, I catch a faint whiff of a sweet scent, finished with the sharpness of ginger—Ivory soap—the same kind my grandma used. The smell relaxes me and makes me forget for a moment. I take in a deep breath through my

nose, lungs filling to full and feel a wetness and pressure at the back of my closed eyes. I open them and blink quickly. Auntie pats my hand gently.

"You're a good kid, Jane," she tells me quietly.

On my walk back, I think about what my mom and dad always say about the homeless—they are dirty; they are lazy; they do drugs; they are criminals—I'm not sure about Auntie's entire story but she doesn't seem like a lazy criminal and drug addict. She also smells pretty good. She told me once that she tried out a homeless shelter but that it was too crowded, too smelly and too noisy and that made her uncomfortable, so she prefers to stay here at the mall. I think I'd do the same too. The mall is clean, and pretty safe.

Before long, I reach Panda Fast and see a line of five customers. I speed up and jog over.

"Sorry," I whisper to John, who is in super-fast server mode, and pull on my apron and hairnet.

"It's fine," he says. But I know he's annoyed.

To the next customer I say, "White rice, brown rice or noodles?"

The next day when I arrive at Panda Fast after school, the first thing I notice is a man dressed all in black and carrying a giant camera on his shoulder. Then I see a tripod with a large light that is shining onto my parents, who are smiling and talking to a well-coiffed and heavily made up woman holding a black microphone that has KCTV labeled around the middle. I squint at them. Why is there a camera crew huddled around the front of the stall?

"Over there! That girl gave me the fortune cookie!" yells a white guy.

I turn my head and look him over. Where do I know him? He ambles over with a big grin and holds out his hand for a high-five.

The smile is familiar, as are the creepy eyes. It sinks in. Oh right, that was yesterday afternoon's customer!

One of the news crew turns the spotlight to shine on me and the cameraman angles away from my parents and towards me instead.

"This girl gave me the fortune cookie with the lucky lotto numbers!" The guy puts his hand up for a high five again. I step away from him. Weirdo.

The reporter suddenly appears in front of me. She thrusts a microphone into my face and says, "How do you feel about this guy" and points to him, continuing, "winning last night's one million dollar jackpot with the fortune cookie you gave him?"

I'm speechless. I'm pretty sure my mouth is agape. My fingers drift up to my chin, where a colony of white-headed pimples have been roosting for the past week. I'm totally going to get made fun of tomorrow in school when this news goes viral.

To my relief, my mom rushes forward, pushes the reporter away and says, “No, no, she’s a child. No filming. Just us.” The reporter looks surprised, but acquiesces and motions the cameraman back to my parents, who are standing side by side against the backdrop of the Panda Fast sign, a cheerful panda holding chopsticks. The interview continues for a few more minutes. As I watch them, my mom and dad’s heads seem to inflate with each nod and smile, until they look like human bobbleheads. Before the reporter can conclude, my parents grab the microphone from her, look straight into the camera and say, “Come on over to Panda Fast, and you might get the next winning lotto number too!”

A moment of silence follows before the reporter stutters, “Uh, uh, okay! Umm, there you have it!”

Great, I think. We are going to be mobbed with lotto hopefuls. It will be purgatory for the next couple of weeks.

We have lots of customers at Panda Fast in the weeks that follow the KCTV interview. Some folks don’t even order food. They just want a case of fortune cookies. The demand is so high that my study area behind the steam table is temporarily overtaken by a neatly stacked wall of brown cardboard boxes, with red “Asian” font lettering in the front, spelling out “A-may’s fortune cookies”. At night, my parents busily count out the bills and change from the cash register and tally the credit card receipts. I’ve never seen them so happy, not when I won the 6th grade writing competition, not when John scored an almost perfect 1580 on his PSATs, never.

Today, we’re finally back to normal. The mall is empty this late afternoon, and the moment I see John make his way across the food court with his backpack, I pack some soup for Auntie. I haven’t seen her much because it has been so busy. Two days ago, I noticed she had a slight cough, so this soup should be soothing. Once John enters Panda Fast, it’s like he has handed me the baton for a relay, and I take off. As I approach the loading dock, I hear barking coughs slice through the air like a fire alarm, and I see Auntie curled up on the bench. Her face is sallow, and in between coughs, she is gasping for air. I sprint over, my sudden movement causing the soup to slosh out of the container. Ow! I shake my hand as thick hot soup dribbles out from the container onto my palm. Drops of soup land on the concrete and I notice a mix of rusty red and vibrant red dots on the ground next to the bench. Auntie continues to hack, her cough uncontrollable. I put my hand on her convulsing torso and feel bird bones under her well-pressed cotton shirt and woolen jacket. I wrinkle my nose. There is a rancid sourness mixed with her familiar Ivory scent.

“Auntie, are you okay?” I ask, frantic.

She can’t reply, and instead continues to hack and heave.

Her hair is matted with sweat and I can see through to her scalp.

I’m not sure what to do. My mom and dad will be furious that I’ve been giving food to a homeless person for the past couple of months. But I’m scared. Auntie is sick and she needs help. I can’t leave her here. She’s not a stray kitten that I found on the street.

I race back to Panda Fast and am out of breath, holding my side, when I arrive at the stall. John looks at me, perplexed. I rush past him and burst through the swinging door to the kitchen. My parents, chopping vegetables, look up from round butcher blocks and pause their cleavers, alarmed.

“Auntie, I mean, there’s a lady who is sick, and needs help.” I blurt out.

“Jane, what are you talking about?” my mom asks, brow furrowed. “I looked out there a minute ago and there’s no one in the food court.”

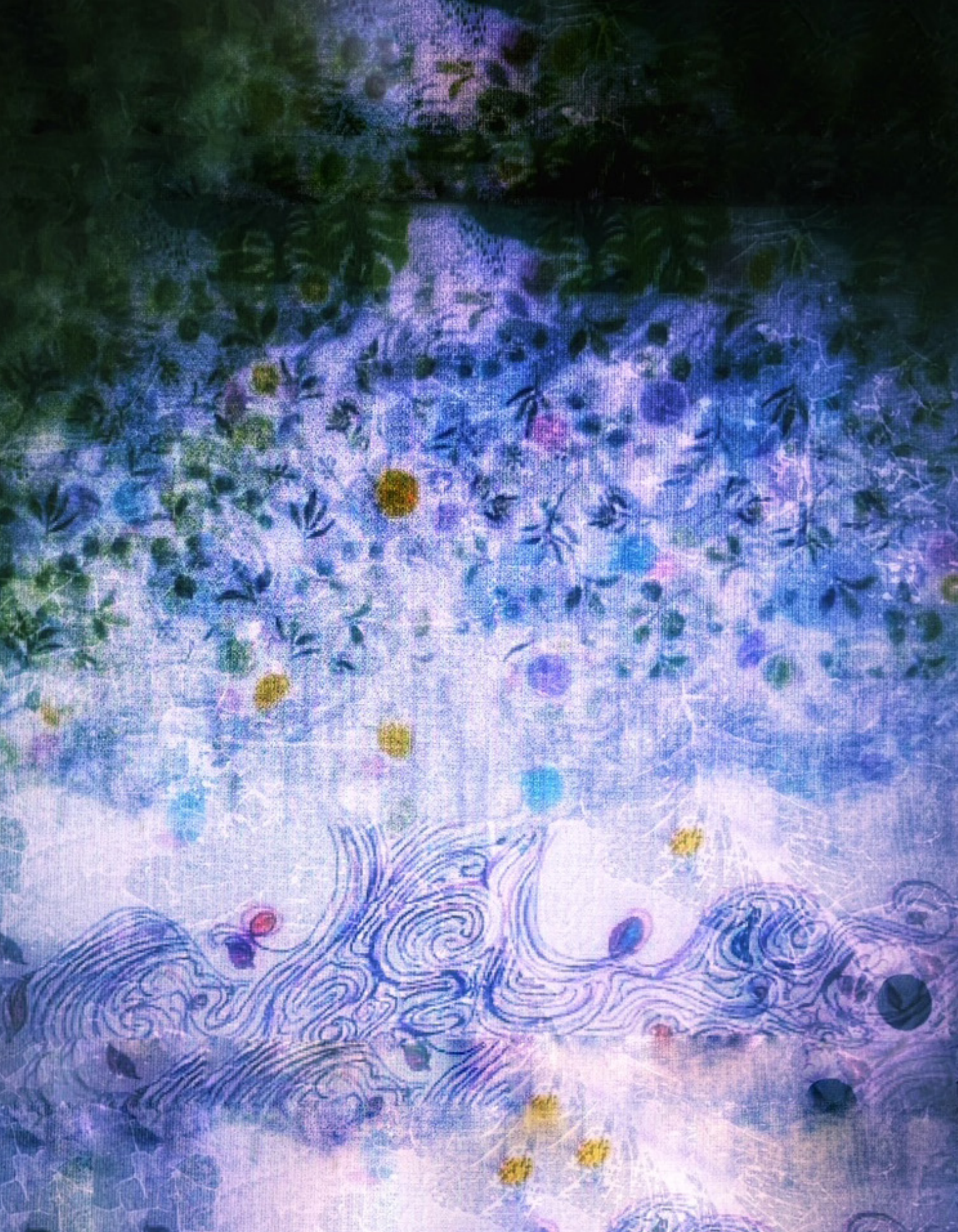
“There’s an old lady who lives at the mall. She’s homeless and I’ve been bringing her food since she’s hungry. She’s really nice and a good person, but I think she is sick, really sick, because I saw blood where she was sitting and she’s coughing and can’t stop and can’t talk and can’t breathe and she looks weird and yellow, even though she’s Black, and she’s not right, she doesn’t even smell right.” The words spill out of me.

Both of my parents are silent, slowly taking in what I’ve said, like two cows, chewing on grass twice before digesting it. Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, goes the second hand on the wall clock in the kitchen.

Finally, my dad pulls off his stained apron, and says, “Okay, take me to her. We will help.”

Artwork: Step on the crack
by Siri Hæg





Atmospheric River

Jed Moffitt

First, someone forecast
Showers,

Then
Rain,

Then,
A six-day storm,
Which became
A significant weather event,

Then...
Like a newborn,
Someone christened her with a name.

Atmospheric River,
Take my mind.
Like your older cousin, Whisky,
Born of Willie's repertoire.
Don't let my memory torture me
With the simple names
That you were called before.

Place coins upon my eyes.
The ferryman has fled the underworld,
And taken to the skies.
Charon, child of night,
Bless my stormy ride
With a Joni song:

I wish I had an Atmospheric River
I could skate away on.

New to the pantheon,
"Bomb Cyclone" thunders in
On the leading edge of the low pressure
front.
Captain of the stampeding wild hunt;
Patrolling the sky,
Riding herd on escaping names.

He gallops the Atmospheric River
Like John Wayne tracking highwaymen;
Like Slim Pickens
At the end of Dr. Strangelove;
Straddling the nuke that dooms the earth,
Whooping like a cowboy.

Is it enough to simply be wet when,
Trembling in dread,
You can be bombed
By a cyclone instead?

And what new names still run free?
What semantic stallions
Have yet to feel the rein and the bit?
Out there... where the restless poets
Of the red evening sky sit, and
Perturb the frenzied sea of untamed vo-
cabulary.

Fragile Realities

Kathleen Luz

truth changes in a second
one extra grain of knowledge can flip
every world
every word fluctuating, beating waves
the butterfly wings that flail, fanning tsu-
namis
the droplets that land upon your feet car-
rying the weight of 230-thousand souls
the heartbeats, every hard beat's a single
note that reaches your nose to carry you
back to
memories and days long lost and uncov-
ered, and the sudden feeling
of unfamiliarity with the single constant
promised through life, that your mind will
always be yours, a company that can't be
lost but now bankruptcy has robbed

that one safeguard between
sanity and the insane, white
walls cascade and crash
and the horizon can no longer
be found between white sky
and sea foam reflecting the
heavens.

--the gulls fly and die upon
the rocks you cling to, blood
mingling on salty clay. sting-
ing
feet overworked, blackmailed
by the threat of their own
lives to the black waves that
smash them on the black
oysters, thirsting in the teasing
tide.



Artwork: Still life by Lena li

Café Müller: An Glance at Ordinary Spirits in Post-WWII Germany

Yutian Cheng

The dynamic of flow patterns, the weave of direct and indirect pathways, various contrasting uses of weight, and repetitive movements in Pina Bausch's Café Müller reflect the social environment of Germany, especially in the spiritual condition and human relationships, in the first decade after the end of World War II.

The choreographer Pina Bausch (1940-2009), one of the most significant choreographers in the realm of dance theatre, was born in Solingen and died in Wuppertal. She was trained at the Folkwang School in Essen under Kurt Jooss. She directed and renamed the renowned ensemble—Tanztheater Wuppertal, which is then regarded as the archetype of the terminology, dance theatre (*Talking about People through Dance - Pina Bausch Biography*). The score Café Müller, inspired by Pina's childhood memory as growing up in her parents restaurant and observing people from all the walks during and after WWII (*Talking about People through Dance - Pina Bausch Biography*), is a memoir of Pina and a product of the collaboration among choreographers that grapple with the perpetual and then-hot-button human spiritual issues of trauma, isolation, and liberalism (Servos and Norbert).

Café Müller premiered in 1978 in Tanztheater Wuppertal in Germany and set in the context where Germany was defeated and damaged in all aspects as a former-fascist country, and people in Germany were physically traumatised by the war and poor economy and mentally plagued by the guilt and existential crisis stemming from the identification of former-Nazi. In politics, Germany lost its rights and dignity, being occupied, controlled, and then divided, by the Berlin Wall in 1961 (History of the European Union 1960-69), into two ideologically adverse parts, which is also the constituent of the Cold War between Western Democracies and Communist Nations. Marked as the foundation of the economic recovery of Europe and facing the unprecedented damage of war (Tamás Vonyó), the Germany reconstruction required broad cooperation and collaboration among people sharing the same land but diverse in all possible ways. The

postwar German society consisted of people whose experiences, memories, and values vary in the range from “denial of guilt to acceptance of individual responsibility” (Hagemann, et al), foreign people from Allies countries, and Jews escaped from Holocaust. Moreover, each encounter with others could be a nightmare which materializes the intense confrontation in ideology, history, and identification.

Inspired by such societal conditions, Pina Bausch sheds light on ordinary life in early postwar Germany to illustrate the struggling and murky atmosphere in the particular socio-political context. Café Müller, different from classical theatric dances employing facial expressions to act out emotions, involves the regime of dance theatre that weighs the most on body movements and focuses on invoking the audience by delivering emotions in more liberal methods of dance, text, narrative, and so on. As we can see, the elements of gestures, abstract movements, and repetition leverage the audience's personal experiences of war and postwar life and subtle emotions of ambivalence. Additionally, a standard righteous perception is unnecessary to appreciate dance theatre pieces with which every observer is free and glad to be seen to create their unique connection, reflecting the rising vibe of liberalism and anti-authoritarianism in Germany during the postwar period.

Pina's choreography is the “combination of poetic and everyday elements influenced the international development of dance decisively” (*Talking about People through Dance - Pina Bausch Biography*) according to her biography from Pina Bausch Foundation established by her son. Café Müller, one of her masterpieces, exemplifies such characteristics and displays Pina's observance and contemplation on Germany and German people in the 1950s. The dance is set in a local Café embodied by a revolving glass door and tables and chairs—ordinary objects in people's daily life—representing the obstacles and constraints in the way to reconstruction and freedom. At 3:01, a sleep-walking female in white petticoat slowly wanders among tables and chairs from left to right in a line,

which illustrates the difficult journey of reconstruction upon messes and healing from trauma.

At 4:27, 5:40, and 6:20, male dancers in black suits assist the sleep-walking lady to move freely via cleaning tables and chairs in her way, symbolizing the coordination between people to go through the rough time. The contrast between the lady's light and free straying and the men's quick and intense cleaning up portrays the dynamic of the mental condition of trauma and hope of German people which derives from the multifaceted reality facing them—the Nazi past and the challenges of reconstructing the country. The tension between the movements also provokes a worry for the safety of the lady that if the men do not act swift and accurately enough, then she may get hurt. The same worry prevailed in Germany among ordinary people after WWII: can people reckoning with the huge historical mistake get back to the right track, and how can they make it?

At 10:26, a female dancer steps toward her male partner to hug him, and they embrace each other with the female resting her head on her partner's left shoulder. A suited male approaches from the corner and separates the hugging couple and adjusts their gestures to the manner satisfying him: having the male hold his partner with his outstretched arms. However, the standing dumb male fails to keep the female from sliding down to the floor. As soon as the female touches the floor, she stands up and goes to hug her partner who shows no answer to her affection. Then, the suited male approaches again to adjust their position and put the female onto her partner's outstretched arms. The serial of interaction between the three dancers repeats several times, and the movements of the suited helper and the female get heavier and quicker after each cycle. Eventually, the suited helper loses his patient, thrusting the female to her partner then running away while the couple, after another slipping, starts to automatically repeat the previous pattern even without the interference of the suited helper. Their movements get faster and more fierce that at their last try, the female throws herself to the male and slides down with a loud painful thud. The suited male embodies the authoritarian shaping ordinary people's behaviours. The hugging and holding are symbols of the human connection which ends up within the dismal disconnection. The contrast between the earnest female representing

the desire to get connected and her indifferent partner showing the symptom of PTSD from war illustrates the then-German societal status: the unhealed trauma and fragmentation tampers with the need for integration and cooperation.

So many exclusive adjectives can be used to describe Germany and German people's ordinary life in the early postwar period, such as democracy and communism, recovery and deterioration, and cooperation and isolation. In the piece of dance theatre *Café Müller*, Pina Bausch depicts the societal turbulence from the perspective of ordinary German people via utilizing repetitive abstractive gestures and movements. It has been almost eight decades since WWII ended and about five decades since *Café Müller* premiered, we could still contemplate the time-penetrating topics—war, trauma, and human relationships—through Pina Bausch's works, such as *The Rite of Spring* (1975), *Kontakthof* (1978), *Nelken* (1982), and *Vollmond* (2006) (*Talking about People through Dance - Pina Bausch Biography*).



Photo: Lonely Barn
by William Benner

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Michele Harper's The Beauty In Breaking:

Putting the Comfort in Uncomfortable

by Rachel Erihman

Unless initiated on our own, humans don't like change. We don't like unprecedented events altering the course of our lives, we're uncomfortable with having our ideas criticized, and we especially don't like when our views don't align with the vast majority of society. Michele Harper, in her memoir *The Beauty in Breaking*, recounts these uncomfortable changes in almost every aspect of her life — her fiancée leaving her and flashbacks in the emergency room from her abusive childhood are only some examples of what she had to deal with. Some would let these experiences anchor them down, but Harper broke free and refused to let her past define her. Harper takes us along her journey of self-discovery and recovery from traumatic events both within her and others' experiences; she acknowledges the feelings of directionlessness and instability and shares bits and pieces of her experiences that shaped who she is today. In Harper's memoir, she demonstrates that individuals find comfort in familiarity, but it is the essence of that discomfort in those challenging changes that truly allows you to "break" within your existence and fully move forward with your life. Harper demonstrates that trauma comes in all shapes and sizes, as it varies in magnitude, affects people in different ways, and leaves people in different positions. Through reflecting on her childhood trauma shaping her career, Harper emphasizes that her career would not have been as profoundly impacted if not for her experiences that shaped her into who she is. She frequently recounts her abuse and trauma from her childhood and early adulthood years, which, through her recounting, indirectly alludes to what she means by "breaking". As a child, her father's constant abuse left her both psychologically and emotionally damaged, and she often felt alone, without the support she desperately needed (Harper ch.2). In a powerful moment that connects her past to her present, Harper encounters a young girl in the emergency room—an innocent victim of her father's violence, beaten unconscious. This experience brings back painful memories from Harper's own childhood, highlighting how similar their situations are. Through these reflections and experiences, Harper's story not only shows her strength but also emphasizes the need for understanding and support for those who suffer. Her journey underscores the importance of empathy in breaking the cycle of trauma, both for herself and for the

vulnerable patients she seeks to help. In terms of what this cycle of trauma means in the context of breaking, Harper shows that individuals overcome trauma in different ways through an analogy on the difficulties of life. Though no individual's experience could be equated with that of another, what we can make of ourselves is what brings us together and allows us to find similarities in our experiences. She writes, "Some begin the journey on flat, grassy meadows and others at the base of a very steep mountain. One path, seemingly smooth, can make it nearly impossible for us to see the ditches and gullies along the way. The other, while painfully tough, can deliver what it promises: If you can navigate that path, you've developed the skills to scale Everest" (Harper 95-96). Different people start their lives in different situations — some are born into easy, comfortable lives, while others face tough challenges right from the start. The imagery of smooth paths versus steep mountains illustrates that while some may have it easier, they might miss out on learning important lessons about resilience. On the other hand, those who struggle within their lives learn skills that can help them tackle even bigger challenges later on. This connects to the theme of trauma in her life — seeing parts of herself in the young girl in the hospital, Harper emphasizes that "breaking" becomes a transformative process. "Breaking" acknowledges the hurt and hardship but emphasizes that through this journey, individuals can learn, adapt, and ultimately rise above their circumstances. Harper overcame her childhood trauma, and knows that the girl will, too, rise above her hardships and make something of herself that isn't defined by her trauma. Harper's experiences demonstrate that while trauma can be deeply painful, it can also lead to profound personal growth and the ability to empathize with and support others on their own journeys. Growth is influenced by change, but it certainly doesn't happen because we want it to; it happens because it has to. No one wants to relive, acknowledge, or talk about their trauma in order to move forward from it, but if not for reliving, acknowledging, and talking about it, there is no way to move forward from its anchoring hold on someone's life. In an article from the Cleveland Clinic titled "How To Heal From Trauma", Natacha Duke, a registered psychotherapist, identifies different types of trauma and how to overcome it through drawing a

distinction between big-T Trauma and little-t trauma. Duke writes, The difference between these two isn't really a matter of severity, but rather how it affects your mind. Big 'T' trauma is likely the first thing you think of when you think of trauma: Large, bombastic moments that can alter your physical and mental well-being. The big 'T' trauma would be like a mass trauma and it would be a circumstance that most people, no matter who they are, would find traumatic, so, it could be anything that causes emotional distress or that is out of the ordinary. (Duke) Examples of big-T trauma would be sexual assault or military combat, while little-t trauma would be the loss of a pet or a breakup. Throughout Harper's memoir, we witness various kinds of big-T and little-t trauma, both within Harper's life and throughout the individuals' lives she writes about; in particular, through her conversation with Vicki, the ex-military soldier looking Vicki decided enough was enough and finally sought the clearance she knew she needed (again, not wanted) and Harper knew she was stronger than someone who lets tragedy define them. Sometimes, however, this breaking isn't as cookie-cutter-esque as it is painted out to be. It's not necessarily true that therapy or some form of help is sought after something tragic; in fact, according to an article published by Judith Herman M.D., a psychiatrist in

the department of psychiatry at Cambridge Hospital, claims that recovery is only possible when you depend on other people. She writes, Recovery ... is based upon empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections... it can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In renewed connections with other people, the survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience ... Just as these capabilities are originally formed, they must be re-formed in relationships with other people. Trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life; therefore, the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor. (Herman) In the context of Harper's memoir, we can see that the process of healing is often less predictable and individualized than we might initially expect. Breaking—whether it is initiated through trauma, loss, or any kind of personal setback—disrupts a person's internal and external sense of equilibrium. However, this breaking does not automatically usher in a period of solitude or self-driven recovery. In fact, as Herman points out, true healing is rooted in the empowerment of the individual through relationships. Vicki only sought out help years after returning home from the army. The breaking itself in her life, although painful, allows her to slowly create an opening for new



relationships and a renewed sense of trust, which she found in Harper. Each new connection made can help to rebuild and reinforce the aspects of self that were damaged, creating a collaborative process of healing. Through this communal rebuilding, individuals not only regain a sense of agency but also reshape their identities with the support of others, which ultimately restores the power that trauma had previously taken away. In this way, breaking is seen not just as a source of pain but as an opportunity to find beauty in the human capacity to rebuild through and with others. The beauty in breaking, therein, lies in the courage to face suffering and loss, both our own lives and others', and in the empowerment that comes from rebuilding one's life after it has been fractured. Harper, throughout her life up until this present moment, found beauty in the courage required to face suffering and loss, both in her own life and in the lives of her patients. Her journey illustrates how facing these "breaks" becomes an essential part of healing and growth, enabling her to become a more empathetic doctor and a more resilient individual. Breaking down old parts of herself—whether beliefs, relationships, or expectations—allowed her to rebuild with a clearer sense of purpose and compassion. Her painful divorce, for instance, forced her to confront feelings of rejection, disappointment, and loneliness. But instead

of letting this divorce, this break, define her, she uses it as an opportunity to rebuild a new life on her own terms. Moreover, in her work as an emergency room doctor, Harper also witnessed others' breaking points firsthand. She encounters patients grappling with pain, loss, and often an intense vulnerability. Treating a survivor of domestic abuse, Harper not only provided medical care but also offered empathy and respect, affirming the woman's dignity in a moment of profound vulnerability. These encounters taught her that healing isn't only about physical mending; it's also about listening, affirming, and bearing witness to each person's unique experience, similar to what she did with Vicki. Harper's empathy grows with each story, making her not just a better doctor but also a more compassionate individual. Her memoir ultimately celebrates the idea that breaking, rather than something to avoid or fear, can be a transformative step toward realizing a life imbued with purpose, compassion, and inner strength.

Photo: Cars at Loma Mar 2
by Daniel Goldberger



Open Sky

Mathew Colins

To choose To fight
You lose Your right
To see The light

To day To night
We fight We slay

We say We might
Be right But nay

I pray My plight
Par-ley This fight

The end
Is born
Tran-scend
Our fear
The sky
Is torn
The end
Is here

From the sundered earth
The Demons ascend
To greet the mortals
Who offend

From the open sky
The Angels fall
To end this fight
Once and for all



Artwork: Montara Beach By Jessica Katherine Bird-



In memory of my mother
She walked through life with quiet grace,
She walked a path lined soft with years,
A loving heart, a steady pace.

Every step was a story, a laugh, some tears,
She met life's storms with quiet strength and weathered grace.

But illness came, and darkness grew,
Each day became a struggle,
Yet she smiled, and she stayed.

But then the skies began to dim,
Her breath grew thin, her light went dim.
And when the end at last drew near,
It came not with fear, but peace, so clear.
She let go softly, free from pain,
And joined the ones who had gone before.

Her mother's arms, her father's smile,
Her siblings waiting all the while.
It felt, in part, a sweet release—
That she had finally found her peace.

And I watched.
Powerless.
Hopeful.
Broken.

Still, sorrow tugs in quiet ways,
The missing moments in my days.
One more morning, one more laugh?
One more moment from the past?
No Good Morning. No Goodnight.
No Are you hungry? Are you all right?
Just echoes in a hollow space,
The silent shape of her embrace.

At times, I smile, relieved she is free.
Her laughter, somewhere, fills the air.
Most times, I question: "Why her?"
The days move on, but I am still,
Just breathing, walking, moved by will.

A shattered heart that no one sees,
A loneliness that is never seen,
Despair, the darkness no one sees.
I wait for dreams where she might speak,
Where I feel her kiss upon my cheek.
Where arms once held me, safe and warm—
And grief stops feeling like a storm.
This pain, this love—it does not end.
She is gone, yet always here,
My mother's voice I ache to hear.

So, I carry her unseen,
In every moment, in every dream.
And though I am broken, though I am lost,
Her love somehow keeps me calm.

Love remains—so fierce, so strong.
It lingers, even though she is gone.
And in my heart, she softly stays,
Guiding me throughout the days.

Her Journey Home

Irma Hernandez

My Mother Never

Chloe Levadoux

My mother never got to hurt.
The quiet caretaker, standing by
Her daughter's side. Her mother's
side.
Her brother's side. Her son's side.
At 10 she had to protect a broken
family
Being a rock when she was only a
feather
Now 50, she still protects her own
anxious teenagers
As they beg and plead to hurt a little
less

My mother never got to be reckless.
The stakes were always there,
Debt chasing her, climbing her spine
Strangling her. Even in its absence
It still follows, whispering of return-
ing one day
Her closet is lined with love,
extravagance long forgotten. Yet,
she still buys her daughter new
gloves,
When she sees her hands are frozen.

My mother never got to yell.
When the world trampled over her
soft skin,

Took her father, pulled her brother
away.

When everything goes wrong,
Her silence is awaited, not her
speech.

Yet in saying this, perhaps I am
wrong.
She yelled in all the small ways.
In quiet resilience, in continuing to
exist.
When politics tried to silence her,
She stood by her family, her friends,
herself.

Maybe she was reckless.
The audacity of continuing to love,
In a world that asks only for hate.
Maybe she even hurts,
But I don't get to see it yet.

I am my mothers daughter.
Thanks to her,
I yell a little louder,
Hurt a little more
Am a little more reckless.
Thanks to my mother
I hold my head a little higher.
Thanks to my mother,
I am proud to call myself a woman.

Photo: Pure and Simple
by Phuong Hoang

Woven in Worlds

Alexis Rose

I have lived where the sun bows low,
spilling gold over quiet waters,
where my grandmother's hands,
lined like riverbeds,
pressed dough into stories, into home.
I have stood where the wind sings sharp,
where steel towers scrape the sky,
and my father's oil-covered gloves, cracked and worn,
built tomorrows he never touched.
I have danced where the earth runs wild,
where drums beat like thunder in the chest,
where my mother's dirt-covered shoes, heavy with years,
carried the weight of our name.
I have eaten from tables carved by time,
where spices whisper of distant lands,
tasted the salt of my own tears
when the voices of my ancestors

called me back.
I have spoken in borrowed tongues,
words heavy with meaning I did not birth,
yet still, they wrapped around my ribs
like lullabies I had always known.
Dragged by fate
My footsteps echo the song of my family,
The people who have risked
Everything for slivers of light
We are the children of singers,
dancers
Loud voices and nimble
Clumsy fingers
That create families and masterpieces from dust.
I have left behind and carried forth,
woven between past and present,
a patchwork of prayers, labor,
and love,
stitched with every step across the earth.
For culture is a river wide,
and I am its drifting tide—
never lost, but never home,
belonging everywhere,
and nowhere alone.

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