STACKED DECKS AND WILLING VICTIMS: ADORNO'S "PROLOGUE TO TELEVISION"

SAM BARNETT

In his "Prologue to Television," the prominent 20th century social critic Theodor Adorno addresses television's damaging effects on its viewers. Writing in 1963, a decade after television's rise to the mainstream, Adorno describes television as the "vanguard" of the "culture industry," an evocative phrase that implicates the media in the larger conversation surrounding production and consumption (55). Specifically, he argues that television reinforces people's existing opinions of themselves and their position, noting that "This would correspond to the economically justified overall tendency of contemporary society not to try to progress beyond its present stage in its forms of consciousness" (50). As it was then, television today is an engine for the suppression of critical thought and class consciousness, created and maintained for the benefit of the economic establishment.

For Adorno, this arrangement can only stand so long as the public is unaware of it. A critical aspect of the media's preservation, then, is its rhetoric of self-defense, or in other words, how it apportions blame onto others. In Adorno's view, this is performed strikingly well: "The culture industry can insist all the more convincingly that it is not the murderer but the victim who is guilty: that it simply helps bring to light what lies within humans anyway" (55). Adorno's language is scathing and his overall position condemnatory. Although he only uses this metaphor in a single sentence of his essay, his use of "murderer" and "victim" to describe the industry and the public respectively can be seen to cement his critical stance; there are few more damning distinctions. On the surface, he positions the situation as akin to a courtroom trial wherein the murderer has managed to smooth-talk the jury into taking his side. The guilt would appear to lie solely upon the industry as the "murderer" of the consumer. Yet as we will see, he also positions the public as willingly complicit in this trap, falling prey to television's ideological manipulation essentially of their own volition. How can we account for the agency Adorno affords the viewer in our understanding of his project, given the corrupt, self-serving nature of the system with which they interact?

Even in his very representation of the culture industry's ability to absolve itself from blame, Adorno draws attention to the necessarily interactive nature of this deceit. After all, the media insists on its point "all the more convincingly" for the benefit of public perception alone (55). Thus, even as he paints his stark image of the culture industry as a murderer, Adorno implicates the industry's victims in the engendering of their own complacency. It is this central tension to which the "Prologue" subtly draws the reader's attention: the unforgivable crimes of the culture industry are only possible through the (albeit coerced) cooperation of the masses. His argument is far more complicated than just a call for reform within the establishment of the media. Its stakes

are much higher. The onus falls, to some extent, on the viewers to free themselves from the trap, to stop blaming themselves, and to see through the deceptions of the media. This leaves us with a number of questions: To what extent is the average TV viewer doing this? And can they really be expected to do any better?

While he no doubt acknowledges that the viewer is indeed the "victim" in this exchange, and media the "murderer," Adorno draws attention throughout the "Prologue" to the eagerness with which the viewer hurtles to their own demise. Consider his description of the process by which they allow television into their lives: "The border between reality and the work becomes blurred for consciousness. The artwork is perceived to be a part of reality, a kind of accessory for the apartment, something that came with the purchase of the television set" (52). Adorno adroitly conveys how depictions of life on the television screen become almost indistinguishable from their surroundings, smoothly insinuating themselves into consciousness. This is accomplished partly through the convenience of the programming, but also through the technology's ideological and physical positioning in the home. And for this, Adorno argues, the viewer is entirely responsible. They perceive television as a technological and artistic marvel and place it on hallowed ground; in doing so, they seal their fate. Just as Adorno condemns the culture industry, his opinion of the viewer is similarly sour.

Yet his work also illuminates the ways in which the viewer's complicity in their own indoctrination is a function of television's seductiveness as much as one's own agency in the matter. Adorno attributes the willingness of the viewer's participation in part to the sense of companionship that television engenders in its users. The realism of the content contributes powerfully to this perceived warmth: "[Images] are supposed to lend luster to his dreary quotidian life and nevertheless essentially resemble it … The lack of distance, the parody of fraternity and solidarity has surely contributed to the extraordinary popularity of the new medium" (52). Realistic depictions of daily life may appear to serve the interests of the consumer. In fact, Adorno claims, they merely provide a deceptive affirmation of the universality of one's situation. Moreover, they avoid the creation of programming that, for the viewer, is "unbearable because it would remind him of what he is being deprived of" (52). Comforting, relatable programming isn't just a failure to utilize all of television's potential as an artistic medium. In its refusal to offer the viewer anything that might allow them to think critically on their position, television keeps them hooked, offering a comfortable and pacifying worldview with which to console themselves.

The storied tradition of Western societies' efforts of indoctrination also plays deeply into Adorno's understanding of the viewer's role as an accomplice in their own mental domination. In his view, TV may be a perfect storm, the "vanguard" of the culture industry. But it has only assumed this position by taking up the mantle from the "English novel," which in turn arose from even earlier "ideological manipulations" used by old-world societies (55). The goal of such "manipulations," as Adorno

describes it, is the "inculcation of conformist behavior" (55). In this estimation, the Western world has had the same ideas drilled into it for generations, creating a culture of compliance. It is this long history that allows the industry to so compellingly "insist … that it simply helps bring to light what lies within humans anyway" (55). In accepting—or rather, inheriting—this worldview, television's audience facilitates the exchange of their own rapt attention for the culture industry's indoctrinating assertions.

Implicit in Adorno's argument against this process is a denial that any such complacency or mundanity is, as the culture industry would suggest, intrinsic to human nature. A cynic might argue that his very imposition of complicity onto the viewer undermines this particular line of argument—in a sense, the viewer's failure to see through the media's lies serves as a litmus test for the very characteristics it professes are unshakable; however, he is in fact intimating that the culture industry's view of humanity is a deception. Returning to Adorno's exact phrasing, the culture industry "can insist all the more convincingly" on its innocence and on the victim's guilt. Try as it might, though, it can never make such a claim true. It can only strive to maintain its "deceit," with greater or lesser degrees of persuasion (55). From this perspective, the viewer is far more capable than what the industry's definition of human nature would suggest. Those who watch television are complicit in their own demise. But in recognizing their own value—as humans with agency and perhaps as valuable companions in and of themselves—they have the ability to come back from the dead.

While the media's victims are in no way exempt from responsibility in their acceptance of the culture industry's propaganda, the cards are stacked against their self-realization and subsequent defiance in a number of ways. Television serves as a companion that is immensely reassuring, even as it anesthetizes the viewer's mind. Its indoctrination rests atop a mountain of past media, whispering through the generations into the public's ear: you aren't good enough. Yet in its frustrated depictions of the viewer's self-enslavement through parasitic companionship, and in its refutation of the industry's assertion that people are "conformist" by nature, Adorno's "Prologue" suggests that the viewer—and by extension, the listener, player, and user—are indeed capable of better (55). Its lessons go beyond the media's function as a structure of indoctrination. We are only the industry's victims, Adorno argues, so long as we allow ourselves to be.

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THE CAPACITY OF THE CRYPTIC

ZOE DAVIDSON

Jamaica Kincaid's essay "In History" interrogates the word "history," questioning if the term adequately describes the pain and legacy of colonialism. For such a probing essay, Kincaid employs some notably nondescript language. This stylistic choice is epitomized by Kincaid's frequent use of variations of the phrase "people who look like me." Indeed, she begins the essay by asking, "What to call the thing that happened to me and all who look like me? Should I call it history? If so, what should history mean to someone like me?" (Kincaid 1). Without a pause to explain what "to someone like me" means, Kincaid rapidly continues to pose rhetorical questions.

Kincaid's choice to skip defining the term leaves readers in the lurch. Who is Kincaid referencing when she says "someone like me"? The salient omission begs the question: why not offer a definition?

Functionally, by leaving the term undefined, Kincaid forces her readers to supply a definition themselves. Do we immediately think of Black people? Colonized people? Indigenous people? Oppressed people? This subconscious task asks us to interrogate the answer we supply. Why do we think of those groups? When Kincaid first uses the phrase "someone like me," she has not given her readers any context; there is nothing to suggest we are talking about colonialism or slavery and yet, our minds almost certainly think of that history. Through this ingenious sleight-of-hand, Kincaid reminds us that all Americans draw on a ubiquitous knowledge of our violent past. The reader may be positioned differently from Kincaid, but we all live in a world that is riddled with the consequences. We all possess a perturbing facility for creating racial groupings.

Kincaid's game of scholarly *Mad Libs* shows her readers that this tendency to group people by race is rooted deeply in colonial history. For example, when she references Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas she writes,

> His task is easier than he thought it would be; his task is harder than he could have imagined. If he had only really reached Japan or China, places like that already had an established narrative. It was not a narrative that these places had established themselves; it was a narrative that someone like him had invented, Marco Polo, for instance; but this world, China or Japan, in the same area of the world to him (even as this familiarity with each other—between China and Japan—would surprise and even offend the inhabitants of these places), had an order and the order offered a comfort (the recognizable is always so comforting). (2)

Kincaid imagines Christopher Columbus as a man interested in neatly sorting people into groups. She satirically writes, "If he had only reached," as if it were a cumbersome yet necessary task to figure out how to stereotype and sort two continents of people. Kincaid reminds us that Europeans of this era were practiced in establishing "narratives" about foreign cultures. In Japan and China, Marco Polo was eager to reduce two wholly distinct (and historically opposed) societies to one "comforting" unit. These colonizers were not interested in nuance, they were satisfied to lump people "in the same area of the world" together. By juxtaposing this historical act of grouping with the reader's subconscious act of grouping the term "someone like me," Kincaid masterfully demonstrates how history influences our present biases.

Indeed, Kincaid elaborates on the origins of that influence when she cryptically writes of the Americas after the mass genocide of indigenous groups: "It is when this land is completely empty that I and the people who look like me begin to make an appearance" (5). Taken literally, Kincaid is referencing the mass importation of Western Africans to the Caribbean. But metaphorically, the meaning is deeper. There were no "people who look like me" because our complex conceptions of race and power had not yet taken on the dimensions that they have today. That is not to say that prejudice did not exist before 1492. Far from it. Rather, Kincaid is merely demonstrating that our current understanding of race only came into being because of this era in history.

Kincaid's critique of history does not stop with the literal events of the past. Still using the phrase "someone like me," she lampoons historiography as well. Kincaid adroitly reminds us how writings on history have denied people of color individuality by replicating existing biases. In her essay, Kincaid explicitly names only white men while leaving everyone else nameless. Kincaid references Christopher Columbus, Isidorus, Marco Polo, Carl Linnaeus, Nils Ingemarsson (but not his nameless wife), Olaus Rudbeck, Olaf Celsius, George Clifford, and even the biblical Adam. She intentionally contrasts these references with the anonymity of "people who look like me," an act of erasure that mimics Eurocentric writings on history. Scholars have dedicated tomes to specific European streets or holidays or texts, while summarizing entire other continents in mere paragraphs. For a profession obsessed with documentation, why are some names worthy of record and others lazily cast aside? Why are our libraries lined with biographies of white men and only anthropological musings on everyone else?

The stylistic choice to only name white men illuminates how accustomed readers may have become to the biases of historical writing. How many of us read the essay without realizing the stark dichotomy of who gets a name and who doesn't? Have we been so desensitized to the racialized anonymity of historical accounts that Kincaid's choice doesn't raise an alarm bell? The seemingly routine contrast of Kincaid's vague "someone like me" with nearly a dozen named white men shows our collective familiarity with erasure. Because our history teachers have taught us the names of

Christopher Columbus and Marco Polo but not the name Toussaint Louverture, we may not question absence of named people of color from the text. And as Kincaid reminds us through the words of Isidorus, "'If one does not know the names, one's knowledge of things is useless'" (1). If historiography cannot know the names of people of color, it is useless.

Thus, Kincaid's seemingly laconic "someone like me" speaks volumes. Her literary Rorschach test illuminates the shared biases of her readers and diagnoses these as products of colonial history and its subsequent historiography. The effect is such that by the time Kincaid repeats the questions with which she began her essay, the phrase "someone like me" is no longer a mysterious absence. When she asks, "what should history mean to someone who looks like me," for a second time, the phrase is a call to action (7).

And herein lies the final stroke of genius in the term "someone like me": a "me" inherently creates a "you." At the conclusion of the essay, readers must ask themselves if they belong to the "me" or if they belong to the "you." Those whose answer is the latter are forced to contend with the fact that history has not done to them what it has done to Kincaid and the people she describes as "like me." When she asks, "should [history] be an open wound … opening again and again, over and over …?" readers belonging to the "you" will realize that they are not the wounded but the wounders. Readers like me will have to ask ourselves what we can do to suture the gash (1).

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DREAM REVOLUTION: IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIETZSCHEAN ASSAULT ON "TRUTH"

DAVID KING

In his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Friedrich Nietzsche argues that our notion of "truth" is built on deception. He begins the essay by reminding us of our place in the universe, how inconsequential the human intellect is compared to the vast swarms of galaxies around us. Despite this, we believe the world revolves around us, and we deceive ourselves into believing that our perspective and our language, with its arbitrary categories and reductive abstractions, really captures pure truth. We superimpose a rigid, artificially structured world on top of the actual one and impress ourselves with its consistency. Nietzsche's alternative is to embrace incoherency. The "free intellect" is one that "throws metaphors into confusion and displaces the boundary stones of abstractions" (122). It rejects and mocks all the traditional categories and toys with society's convention of "truth." According to Nietzsche, "So long as it is able to deceive without *injuring*, that master of deception, the intellect, is free; it is released from its former slavery and celebrates its Saturnalia" (122, emphasis original).

His caveat, that the free intellect deceives "without *injuring*," is a curious one. Nietzsche says the free intellect "smashes this framework to pieces, throws it into confusion, and puts it back together in an ironic fashion, pairing the most alien things and separating the closest" (122). Wouldn't attacking the social understanding of "truth" in this way place someone in conflict with society? Nietzsche himself says the convention of truth is integral to society. How can we say the free intellect deceives "without *injuring*" while it rattles foundational elements of social existence?

The free intellect goes to war against "truth," but "truth" is a load-bearing element of society. Nietzsche tells us that "the duty which society imposes in order to exist" is "to employ the usual metaphors" and "to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie with the herd and in a manner binding upon everyone" (117). For human beings to live together, there has to be, at some level, a common understanding of reality. In our society, reality is marked by rigid laws and categories. Even though this reality is not really pure truth, it is what everyone has agreed on and is bound to follow. Nietzsche uses the term reality sparingly in this essay, and does not distinguish it from his use of "truth," but he does remark that even "an eternally repeating dream would certainly be felt and judged to be reality" (120). So when the free intellect "throws metaphors into confusion," it is breaking down the glue that holds society together.

Yet Nietzsche argues that it is possible to have a society with a more whimsical convention of truth. He wants us to reconsider the boundary between a "dream" and "real life." Using deception creatively can help blur this boundary, as he says, "Indeed,

it is only by means of the rigid and regular web of concepts that the waking man clearly sees that he is awake; and it is precisely because of this that he sometimes thinks that he must be dreaming when this web of concepts is torn by art" (121). Dreams have an illogical, imaginative quality to them; they toy with reality. After the notion of reality has been torn apart and the deception it is built on is exposed, we are now left to ask: What is the difference between a "dream" and "real life?" Why should we give preference to the consistency of rigid categories? If both are founded on lies, a dream is not any less real than our false perception of waking life. In this case, we might prefer the dream.

If we can substitute reality for a dream in a way that improves everyone's experience of waking life, this may be a way to deceive "without *injuring.*" Myth, which softens the distinction between real and imaginary, is the key to entering a social dream state. Nietzsche states, "because of the way that myth takes it for granted that miracles are always happening, the waking life of a mythically inspired people—the ancient Greeks, for instance—more closely resembles a dream than it does the waking world of a scientifically disenchanted thinker" (121). The "world of a scientifically disenchanted thinker" is a rigid and consistent one. The imagination has no place in that world because imagination does not follow the rules. Dreams are marked by their incoherence, and the "mythically inspired people" will embrace incoherence. People in a culture infused with myth will have a more wondrous experience because they imagine fanciful things occurring on a daily basis. For them, "All of nature swarms around man as if it were nothing but a masquerade of the gods, who were merely amusing themselves by deceiving men in all these shapes" (121-122). The mythically inspired are unshackled and engage with reality in a way rationality cannot allow. By tossing aside the preoccupation with the real, the dreamers have a freer experience.

But free does not mean free from pain. There is a fundamental conflict between Nietzsche's ideal world and the actual one. Reality will not be tossed aside so easily, and changing the values of a society doesn't come without conflict. Myth is diametrically opposed to the current social order and its preoccupation with truth. Nietzsche might say, "deceive without *injuring,*" but we will see that what he truly advocates for is a confrontation with society, a revolution to reshape it into one that is no longer concerned with things like truth and consistency and instead is infused with dream-like, incoherent wonder. He writes,

> Whenever, as was perhaps the case in ancient Greece, the intuitive man handles his weapons more authoritatively and victoriously than his opponent [the rational man], then, under favorable circumstances, a culture can take shape and art's mastery over life can be established. (122)

Nietzsche's commitment to conflict is laid bare here. Deception is a weapon that the "intuitive man" (the one with a free intellect, the one who rejects the concepts

constructed by humans) uses to wage war against the current culture. When the intuitive man "smashes this framework to pieces," it is a targeted attack on society and its conventions. By overpowering the culture, he can attempt to create a "mythically inspired people." Clearly, the words "authoritatively and victoriously" imply another side's defeat, and defeat, of course, usually comes with injury.

It will be helpful to examine a sure case of deception *with* injury, so that we can be more precise about what kind of conflict Nietzsche advocates for. Earlier in the essay, Nietzsche describes "the liar:"

> He misuses fixed conventions by means of arbitrary substitutions or even reversals of names. If he does this in a selfish and moreover harmful manner, society will cease to trust him and will thereby exclude him. What men avoid by excluding the liar is not so much being defrauded as it is being harmed by means of fraud. (116)

The liar switches around categories and manipulates words for a selfish purpose. Society's conventions are arbitrary, but the liar is not condemned because his statements do not match pure truth (no one's statements really do). He is condemned because of his desire to harm and to defraud. So when Nietzsche says deception "without injury," he is defining the intuitive man in opposition to the liar. As a revolutionary, the intuitive man is a harbinger of conflict, but he has no intent to defraud anyone. The intuitive man has a vision for society that is, while not free of pain or instability, emancipated from the prison of concepts. We can say that a revolution of this kind, even though it involves a conflict with society on a fundamental level, will result in a "mythically inspired" society, which has greater value. Since the intuitive man doesn't use deception for selfish purposes, he is not really doing *injury*.

However, Nietzsche himself says that not everyone is ready to be freed. At one point he says, "That immense framework and planking of concepts to which the needy man clings his whole life long in order to preserve himself is nothing but a scaffolding and toy for the most audacious feats of the liberated intellect" (122). Clearly there are some "needy" people who rely on the frameworks that are being attacked and aren't ready to live in an incoherent world. The intuitive man wants to take their crutch—rigid and consistent "truth"—away. Will these people be abandoned? Is it not selfish to leave them behind? Nietzsche appears to consider this objection, saying, "At other times [the free intellect] endeavors, with gloomy officiousness, to show the way and to demonstrate the tools to a poor individual who covets existence" (122). But that definitely doesn't mean that everyone can be shown the way. We are still left with a quandary. Myth may be the key to a freer experience of reality, but the conflict Nietzsche advocates for will bring in a period of disorientation, instability, or even

harm. Nietzsche doesn't give us a lot of advice on how to walk the line between social revolution and avoiding injury.

There is a tension between deception "without *injury*" and the actual project of the free intellect, which not only toys with but also assaults the social convention of truth. The intuitive man's earnest project is to free everyone in society from this convention by converting waking life into something more like a dream. Ultimately, however, the transition from a society founded on empty truth to one inspired by myth will be tumultuous and full of conflict. The intuitive man does not seek to harm as the liar does, but the friction he causes may do so regardless. The intuitive man's goal and intent have been uncovered but the question remains: Do we reject what he is offering because of the danger, or is dream-like freedom worth the cost of revolution?

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MEDICAL MASCULINITY & ATHLETES RETURNING PREMATURELY TO SPORT

NIKHIL PATEL

The 2019 Toronto Raptors were about to do what everyone thought impossible: defeat the legendary dynasty of the Golden State Warriors. The Warriors, widely regarded as one of the best basketball teams of all time, were led by one of the most acclaimed basketball players ever, Kevin Durant, and prominently featured multiple hall-of-famers. There was no team in the NBA that could challenge them. But, in the conference semifinals, disaster struck. Durant was relegated to the sidelines by a lower-calf injury. Due to its proximity to the ever-important Achilles tendon, medical staff determined playing through it was impossible and the injury turned Golden State mortal. The Toronto Raptors capitalized on the situation and jumped to a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals against the former Goliath.

Most people expected Durant to complete rehabilitation according to schedule and finish the season on the sidelines. However, when the Warriors announced that they would be starting Durant in game 5, people across the NBA were stunned. Durant proved why he was so important to the Warriors with a scoring explosion in the first quarter; unfortunately, however, the people who worried about him rushing back too soon from an injury would be proven correct as Durant collapsed early in the second quarter, grasping at his lower calf—the location of what would soon be diagnosed as a ruptured Achilles. Durant was 30 and a soon-to-be free agent looking to sign another mega-contract to leave the Warriors. He had just sacrificed valuable years of his prime and likely millions of dollars to return to a team one more time that he wanted to leave. One could speculate that he was compelled by his 62-million-dollar contract or his desire to lead his team to a championship. These would be reasonable answers if this were an isolated incident instead of yet another high-profile example of a behavior prevalent at all levels of sport: premature return from injuries.

Many studies—notably a 2017 study that focused on ACL injuries and a 2014 study that focused on head injuries (namely concussions)—have documented this phenomenon. Published in an official journal of the European Society for Sports Traumatology, Knee Surgery and Arthroscopy, the ACL study, which focused on athletes ages 15-30, "clearly demonstrates that the majority of the patients [had not] recovered their muscle function once they returned to knee-strenuous sport after ACL reconstruction" (Beischer 1971). The concussion study demonstrated a similar effect: "Many students with sport-related concussions experience a recurrence or worsening of symptoms after premature RTP [return to play] or RTL [return to learn], suggesting that they have not adequately recovered" (Carson e314). While no study has conclusively linked ACL issues with premature RTP, there is significant evidence that

"high re-injury rate after ACL reconstruction among adolescent patients … can be partly explained by the fact that the adolescent patients return to knee-strenuous sport too early, without achieving adequate muscle function" (Beischer 1972).

So why, then, do athletes from across all age groups and all levels of sport seem to rush their recovery time despite the risk of dangerous consequences? What could drive someone to jeopardize their career and future by returning to play too early? The ACL study itself offers some reasons, mostly through its proposed solutions. It calls for "[m]ore effective rehabilitation" and improvements in RTP criteria (Beischer 1972), implying problems with recovery. Similarly, the concussion study locates the problem in diagnostics as well, calling for increased "clarity about the meaning of the term *cognitive rest*" (Carson e314, emphasis original). The data suggests, however, that the problem may also be gender norms. According to the ACL study, at the 8-month marker, "[adult] males had a significantly higher rate of return to knee-strenuous sport compared with females" (Beischer 1969). While this was most pronounced amongst the 21-30 age group (45% of men versus 27% of women), this held true as well amongst adolescents (64% of men versus 44% of women) despite no significant difference in recovery times (Beischer 1969). In other words, far more men than women were rushing to return in less time despite not being any more ready than their female counterparts. Likewise, with regards to the concussion study, 61.8% of male patients returned to school or to play prematurely as compared to 38.2% of female patients (Carson e313). This discrepancy suggests the issue is not merely diagnostics but lies in how athletes and society perceive masculinity.

In his essay, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," sociologist and gender studies expert Michael Kimmel argues that contemporary masculinity "must be proved, and no sooner is it proved than it is again questioned and must be proved again" (28). Kimmel explicitly makes the point that this quest to prove masculinity "takes on the characteristics … of a sport" (28). For Kimmel, the archetype in the sport of masculinity is the "Marketplace Man," which he defines as a consummate competitor "devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment—a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men" (29). In the sports world, where every sanctioned interaction must have a loser, everyone who participates is a "Marketplace Man." By anyone watching (watching even themselves) that loser is immediately considered less dominant than the winner, floundering in the marketplace of athletic competition. Often, it seems, the biggest loss in the minds of athletes is felt by not playing at all. An athlete may do anything he possibly can to avoid looking weak to the other men on the court, to the men in the stands, and to himself. As Kimmel notes: "We take enormous risks to prove our manhood, exposing ourselves disproportionately to health risks, workplace hazards, stress-related illnesses" (37). This willingness to take risks gets amplified when it's not just any athletic competition, but professional sports on the world stage. Durant, for example, had missed nearly a month of game time and,

despite his recovery timetable being 6-8 weeks, was already being lambasted by journalists and fans alike for abandoning his team in the finals (Botkin).

That is not to say that this self-destructive behavior is solely the province of cis-male arrogance or some form of medical mansplaining. It is important not to overlook that while it is predominantly men that return early from their injuries, it is not only men that return early. We can understand why female athletes are also vulnerable to this kind of self-destructive behavior if we abandon the assumption that masculinity only resides in male bodies—a myth disputed by Jack Halberstam, Director of the Institute for the Study of Sexuality and Gender at Columbia University. In the introduction to his book *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam writes that, paradoxically, masculinity is not just another name for men, but rather a role to be fulfilled—a role that is certainly expected on the basketball court—and something that "has finally been recognized as, at least in part, a construction by female- as well as male-born people" (13). Halberstam offers many examples of female-constructed masculinity in the sports world, such as body-builder Bev Francis, tennis player Martina Navratilova, and track-and-field superstar Jackie Joyner-Kersee (15). Halberstam writes explicitly that many athletic women are at this moment the most prominent examples of masculine figures and yet they are still denied their masculinity. This adds an extra impetus for these female athletes to rush back from injury and place their own bodies in harm's way in order to prove that they are not "sissies," the homophobic construct of a fraudulent or incomplete man as Kimmel reminds us (35-36). The trials of proving masculinity for a female athlete, in this case, are likely less recognizable than the more familiar trials of proving masculinity that male athletes face, but may compound the pressure some female athletes face. As Kimmel writes, "masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves" (35). However, Halberstam notes that a female's masculinity becomes more conspicuous as her body matures into womanhood, writing "[i]t is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into compliant forms of femininity" (6). If competing in sports and putting the body at risk are seen as displays of masculinity, then a woman athlete will be judged for any decision, either choosing a self-harming behavior that is distinctly unfeminine or choosing to put her safety first and therefore seeming less competitive, less of an athlete. For some, she will be "revealed as a fraud" either way.

It makes sense then that Kimmel's essay includes a parable of a bully—incredibly insecure of his masculinity—who constantly must beat up smaller kids in order to prove his manhood. However, every time he wins a fight, he is left with an "empty gnawing feeling" brought about by his feelings of inadequacy, where he then must prove his masculinity by winning another fight with another smaller enemy (Kimmel 32-33). To these athletes, even when their ability to fight is taken away, the pressure to fight—to prove that they are not a loser, or a "sissy"—is not. Athletes of all genders,

despite being some of the most traditionally masculine bodies in the world, constantly are forced to struggle with their gender role in society. By competing in front of crowds of people, they are reduced from people to competitors pressured to prove themselves every game or face being considered not tough enough.

Durant may have been convinced—by his fans, by the media, and by "the empty gnawing feeling" (Kimmel 33)—that he had not only to win, but to assert dominance. Because of his injury, he might not be able to assert his dominance against his opponent, the Toronto Raptors—so he had to create a smaller enemy, his own body, and defeat it. Fortunately, he did not sacrifice it all. Learning from his mistake, he took two years off and rehabilitated his injuries to be the best he could (Goldberg). Many athletes, however, are not so fortunate. Slotted into these traditional masculine roles, athletes face immense internal and external pressure to treat their injuries as another athletic event: one that they can either win by returning early or lose by taking the time they need to recover. Understanding and deconstructing traditionally toxic forms of masculinity must be the new end goal, starting with treating the symptoms that cause immediate physical danger. By offering better support for injured athletes and by de-emphasizing the traditionally lauded aspects of domination at every level of sports, we can focus on treating not only the physical but psychological aspects of injury that can ruin not just a season, but an entire career and even a life. The sports world lost out on two years of Kevin Durant that it cannot get back. It can only hope to use that injury to improve itself and ensure that it does not force the next Kevin Durant to make the same mistake. This can only happen if we give that injury the proper time and attention it requires to truly heal.

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RECLAIMING HUMANITY, REMOVED IN SPACE AND TIME: RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S "LETTER RENOUNCING KNIGHTHOOD" IN 1919 BRITISH INDIA

MRINALINI SISODIA WADHWA

On April 13th, 1919, the British General Reginald E. Dyer ordered his troops to open fire on an unarmed crowd of Indian civilians who had gathered that morning in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, for a religious celebration. Hundreds of men, women, and children were killed while others were thrown into a well to escape being shot, buried under their dying relatives' bodies, or left gravely wounded or orphaned. Dyer would soon be celebrated by many Britons as a "saviour" for teaching these Amritsar residents, as well as the rest of British India, a salutary "lesson" not to question Britain's colonial might (Sayer 143, 161-2). Devastation permeated India as the news of the massacre and of Britain's callous response to it spread across the nation (Pedersen).

I still remember these details, printed in the fine black print of a history textbook I had borrowed from my third-grade classroom in New Delhi, India, early in 2010.[1] Reading of the Amritsar massacre is seared into my memory as one of the first times I vividly recall feeling terror from an encounter with history. It was, indeed, seared into the collective memory of Indians in 1919 who were shocked at the brutalization and dehumanization inflicted upon them under British colonial rule. How does one respond to an event that is so horrific—an event that dehumanizes one's people—while removed in space, as other Indians were outside Amritsar, or in time, as I was nearly a century later?

The Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate in Literature Rabindranath Tagore was among those grappling with this question in the summer of 1919. English-educated Indians such as Tagore formed an elite minority in early 20th Century British India, which had historically distanced itself from India's masses to seem as "British" as possible in order to win favors from the colonial government (Mukherjee 30-31). Located in Calcutta, far from Amritsar on the opposite side of British India, Tagore seemed spatially and socially removed from the massacre. Yet in May 1919, he penned a letter to the British Viceroy expressing his dismay and renouncing his knighthood— granted in 1915 after he received the Nobel prize—to stand in solidarity with all of India.[2] Tagore's project seems clear: to re-claim Indians' humanity after "a degradation not fit for human beings" (Tagore). However, the form of Tagore's letter seems to be in tension with this project, for he did not divorce himself from "British-ness" to formulate his claims. Rather, Tagore used the language of the very state he is condemning—writing in English—and maintained deference to British authority by

describing the "honour" of meeting "His Majesty the King" and his "admiration" for the previous Viceroy.[3] How can Tagore's fundamental grievances against the British colonial state be reconciled with his dignifying of these British institutions?

In order to examine how Tagore establishes these grievances and conceptualize his sense of dismay, one might turn to the American journalist Alisa Solomon's essay, "Who Gets to Be Human on the Evening News." Solomon argues that journalism can "confer humanity on some subjects . . . and not on others" (1587). Specifically critiquing Western news coverage of Palestine, she emphasizes how, through "framing" Palestinian subjects without context for their experiences, "the humanity of Palestinians is thrown into question" (Solomon 1589-1590). Tagore's letter reveals his awareness of how similar British media narratives dehumanized Indians. Poignantly, he condemns the "callousness" of British media, pointing out that Dyer's actions were

> praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings . . . smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgement from the organs representing the sufferers. (Tagore)[4]

Tagore's emphasis on how "organs representing the sufferers" have been "smother[ed]" parallels Solomon's critiques of portrayals of Palestinians in the 2000s. By denying Indians the opportunity to voice their "pain" and "judgement," as Tagore observes, the British media trivialized Indians' context of the massacre and made their anti-colonial response seem unjustified—just as Solomon argued that Palestinian resistance seemed "incorrigible" because the Western media "erase[d]" their context of "[Israeli] occupation" (Tagore; Solomon 1589). Notice also the physical connotations of Tagore's language—"brutal," "sufferings," "smothering," and "organs"—when describing the actions of "the Anglo-Indian papers." This language alludes to the massacre's grave physical reality, distorted by the media, of bodies "smothered," "organs" destroyed, "brutal[ity]" inflicted, and human "suffering." In turn, one perceives Solomon's arguments that de-contextualized media coverage is not simply ill-informed, but explicitly dehumanizing: in Tagore's portrayal, these papers inflict figurative violence on *all* "our" (i.e. Indian) bodies in their mockery of the massacre's victims.

Tagore, however, seems also to transcend Solomon's arguments, shifting from condemning decontextualized media narratives to inverting these narratives to dehumanize the British colonial regime. "Such treatment," declares Tagore, "has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organization for destruction of human lives." The alliterated "p" in this line juxtaposes the "population" of Indians with the "power" of Britain. Upon the Indians, Tagore confers humanity, expressing their tragic context of being "disarmed and resourceless." The British, in contrast, become machine-like, an enemy to

humanity, using their powerful "organization" to destroy "human lives." Tagore does not offer any context for Dyer's actions, asserting that "it [the "power"] can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification" for the massacre—i.e., that no such context exists. The force of these words can be measured in Solomon's own arguments: "acting rationally . . . distinguishes human beings from brutes," so when a social group is presented irrationally, as Britons are in Tagore's letter, they appear less than human (1588). Thus, as Tagore lays out his grievances against Britain, he presents the massacre's consequences not only for the Indian masses, who were enduring violence, but also for the British colonial state, who, in his eyes, was losing its humanity.[5]

When his condemnation of Britain was so fundamental, one might question the form of Tagore's letter: why would he choose to write in English rather than his native Bengali? The arguments presented by American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in her essay "Compassion & Terror," may offer some insight into this question. Nussbaum cites the Ancient Greek play *The Trojan Women* as an example where its Greek author, Euripides, "invited [his] [Greek] audience" to feel "compassion for the women of Troy" who had been enslaved, and whose men were massacred, by Greek forces in the Trojan war (Nussbaum 11). She moves, however, to acknowledge the paradoxical form of this play: Euripides evokes compassion for the Trojan women by making them seem Greek, allowing for the audience to conclude "they are just us, and we are the ones who suffer humanly," so they must too (Nussbaum 11). Within this framing, Tagore seems to take on Euripides' role of translating Indian humanity into terms a British audience could understand, writing,

> The disproportionate severity of the punishments inflicted on the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized government.

Tagore's probing use of the word "civilized" evokes the British conception of themselves as a civilization—a notion grounded in the idea that Britons did not wantonly or barbarically kill other human beings and were indeed 'liberating' their colonized non-European subjects from such despotic treatment.[6] By invoking this familiar concept, Tagore urged the reader to extend their sense of civilization to encompass the lives of "the unfortunate people" of Amritsar who had been brutally killed. His decision to write in English, a language that all Britons could understand, strengthens this exhortation: he could address British society at large, not solely the Viceroy. Thus, the form of his letter evidently enables him to reach what Nussbaum would describe as the "narrow" and "self-serving" "sense of compassion" all humans possess, using the English language and concept of "civilized government," so central to Britain's sense of national identity, to appeal to Britons' compassion (11).

However, there is a crucial difference between Tagore's position and what Nussbaum imagines to be Euripides' role. Euripides was Greek, not Trojan, while Tagore was Indian, not British—the former from the society that had inflicted violence, and the latter from the society that had experienced it. Thus, unlike in the case of Euripides, the dehumanization Tagore was writing of reached him, too, suggesting that his appeal to the reader's compassion transcended Nussbaum's Western-centric analysis because it involved his own vulnerability. This is reflected in Tagore's use of the collective subject "we" in the phrases "we are convinced" and "we must strongly assert." There is something radical about Tagore's repeated decision to use "we" rather than the individual "I": he speaks for, and identifies with, the entirety of India, breaking from the tradition of elite Indians segregating themselves from the masses. Tagore's use of the English language takes on a new significance within this context. By 1919, English was not only a British language but also a colonial one, for elite Indians could also access Tagore's letter by virtue of their English education. Tagore's repeated "we" thus becomes an exhortation to his own social class' compassion, urging them to question their proximity to "British-ness" by illuminating how Britain's massacre threatened their humanity, too: if even he, with all his distinctions, was part of this "we," then so were they. By placing his humanity on the line along with that of "the unfortunate people" who died in Amritsar, in terms that Britons and elite Indians alike would understand, Tagore thus extends Nussbaum's arguments to seek compassion not for "the other," but for his own society.

It is in these references to his own position, and exhortations to other elite Indians, that we see the culmination of Tagore's reclamation of humanity. The American theorist Judith Butler's address, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," elucidates this aspect of his letter, for she argues that "the body" whose presence "is being actively … destroyed by military force" should, in tandem with other bodies, enter "the space of appearance" (a phrase she adopts from Hannah Arendt), forming "a new alliance" (6-7). In the final lines of his letter, Tagore seems to present himself as one such body under threat, forming an "alliance" to reclaim humanity in a manner analogous to Butler's vision:

> Knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion for vengeance is blinding the . . . vision of our Government … the very least I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen. (Tagore)

Tagore first establishes the "force" that threatened him—"the passion for vengeance" taking over the colonial government—revealing to him the "helplessness" of his "position" in British India. Though physically unscathed by Dyer's "military force" himself, Tagore exposes the massacre to be part of a larger structure that was systematically dehumanizing Indians. This leaves his body, as that of a colonial

"subject," as vulnerable to abuse in the public arena as the body of "a transgendered person" "walk[ing] on the street" in Butler's lecture (13). Tagore then seems to consciously enter a public "alliance" with the other bodies under "threat" (to use Butler's words) by describing this letter as "the very least I can do" "to giv[e] voice." Tagore might not have marched in public, as Butler envisioned, yet in the act of writing this letter he seems to achieve the same end. He attunes himself to other subjugated bodies, capturing the violence and brutalization that had shocked Indians well beyond Amritsar. He also claims an intellectual "space of appearance" (that is, a space of ideas surrounding civilization and humanity) that had long been dominated exclusively by the West: in his inversion of British media narratives and appeals to British compassion, Tagore's "alliance" of Indians extends and re-conceptualizes this space to include colonized peoples.

The effects of forming such an alliance are profoundly important for Tagore's desire to reclaim Indians' humanity. Butler argues that the alliance confers humanity upon each "body," for "no human can be human without acting in concert with others and on conditions of equality" (9). Tagore seems cognizant of this need to be allied, on equal terms, as he finally explained his decision to renounce the knighthood:

> The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen, who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.

The juxtaposition of the personal "I" and third-person "their" affirms Tagore's awareness of his privileged social standing; "distinctions" such as the knighthood had separated him from his "countrymen," including those slaughtered by Dyer's troops. By renouncing the knighthood, Tagore sought to close this distance, creating the "conditions of equality" that Butler described. In his unique historical context, Tagore appears to extend Butler's concept of an equal alliance by implicitly urging fellow English-speaking Indians to join. To them, his bitter mention of "[the masses'] so-called insignificance" must have been particularly visceral: within the colonial state, they had often been positioned to trivialize the Indian masses while seeking "distinctions," upholding a punishing social hierarchy that encouraged dehumanization and enabled this atrocity even as it promised them illusory political gains. It is as if Tagore sought to shock them out of their blindness, asserting that without an alliance affirming all Indian lives, no individual Indian would be treated as a full "human bein[g]" free from the threat of violence.

At its core, Tagore's letter serves as a stunning vindication of Indians' humanity, persisting in spite of this colonial atrocity. When the letter is placed in conversation with Solomon, Nussbaum, and Butler, it becomes evident how intricately Tagore developed this vindication. He turned exploitative media narratives against the colonial

state, used Britain's language and concepts to invite compassion for massacre victims, and formed a powerful, humanizing alliance in the "true space" that lies "between the people" (Arendt qtd. in Butler 2)—between himself, India's masses, and other elite Indians.

That Tagore could accomplish this much given his own removed-ness from the massacre is immensely compelling. It reminds individuals who are in some way removed from an atrocity that they can reclaim humanity in a language they know, with an audience they can interface with, despite the distances in space and time. It is an idea that resonates with me deeply as I realize, seated in my dormitory in New York, over eleven years after I first read of the Amritsar massacre in New Delhi, that I can shift from experiencing terror to writing in defiance of it.

NOTES
1. I re-encountered the history of this colonial atrocity during my first semester at Columbia, in Professor Susan Pedersen's fall 2020 lecture course, "History of Twentieth-Century Britain," where we read Sayer's article on British media responses to the massacre and Tagore's letter.
2. The Viceroy (at the time, Lord Chelmsford) was the British Crown's official representative in India and the nominal head of the government of British India. Knighthood is an honor granted by the British sovereign (at the time, King George V) to individuals for their achievements or service in a variety of different fields and disciplines.
3. A note regarding the question of language and the reach of this letter: it seems clear that Tagore intended for it to reach a far wider audience than solely Chelmsford. Despite the British government's attempts to censor the letter, its original (English) version was published by the English press, reaching the colonial metropole, and "vernacular" (likely Bengali and Hindi) versions of it was later published by the Indian press. See Associated, Calcutta 2.
4. Today, "Anglo-Indian" as an identity usually refers to persons of mixed ancestry. Tagore, however, is referring to an earlier sense of the term—Britons living in India who authored and published their own English newspapers, which were also accessible in the metropole. For more on British media coverage of the Amritsar massacre, see Sayer.
5. The broader argument that British colonial rule was degrading to Britons themselves would become central to Indian anti-colonialism, echoed by Tagore's contemporaries, including M. K. Gandhi. See Nandy on Gandhi's wish to "liberate the British as much as . . . Indians" (51), and his chapter "The Psychology of Colonialism: Age, Sex, and Ideology in British India" in *The Intimate Enemy* more generally.

6. As an example of the power of such liberal imperialist rhetoric—wielding British "civilization" against "Oriental despotism" to justify colonialism—see Mill 13.

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"WUMBEN, WIMPUND, WOOMUD": AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL CENSURE IN THE INTERNET AGE

ANDREY USPENSKIY

O n June 6, 2020, the childhoods of an entire generation came to an abrupt close. At 5:35 p.m., J.K. Rowling posted a link on *Twitter* to "Opinion: Creating a More Equal Post-COVID-19 World for People Who Menstruate" with the caption: "'People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" (@jk_rowling, "Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?"). What followed can best be described as a cataclysm—as *Variety* reported four days later, J.K. Rowling's "tweets came under immediate criticism for in essence denying that transgender women are women, a stance that for many *Harry Potter* fans flies directly in the face of the books' manifest lessons on inclusion and empathy" (Vary, "Warner Brothers Responds"). Numerous stars from the *Harry Potter* films—as well as Warner Brothers, the rightsholder to the franchise—similarly responded with tweets of their own in support of trans rights (Vary, "Warner Brothers Responds"). The damage, however, was done: for many lifelong *Harry Potter* followers, J.K. Rowling's tweet read like a betrayal (Vary, "What J.K. Rowling's Anti-Trans Views Could Mean"). Speaking to *Variety* in a different article published on the same day, Jackson Bird said, "for [Rowling] to decide to use her incredible platform to be very critical and hateful towards a particular group of people, it just seems an irresponsible use of the platform by one of the most influential people in the world" (qtd. in Vary, "What J.K. Rowling's Anti-Trans Views Could Mean").

As the author of *Sorted*, a memoir chronicling how *Harry Potter* helped him come out as trans, Bird provides what is, perhaps, one of the most poignant examples of the disappointment felt by many of J.K. Rowling's fans. In his memoir, published less than a year before J.K. Rowling's tweet, Bird wrote about his time working for the Harry Potter Alliance, a non-profit dedicated to uniting *Harry Potter* fans for various charitable causes (Bird, *Sorted* 119): "I had already come out to my coworkers and our entire volunteer staff over the course of the preceding months, and they were all perfectly accepting and happy for me. I wasn't surprised in the least, because the [Harry Potter Alliance] had been working on issues of LGBTQ+ equality since they opened their doors in 2005" (195). At this time, the franchise was far from being associated with transphobia and calls for boycott as reported by numerous publications, including an article in *The Independent* about the possible financial consequences of a boycott of future *Harry Potter* franchise media (Chilton). The Harry Potter name was, instead, a symbol of inclusion and equality. Moreover, there seemed little doubt as to Rowling herself being fully behind the LGBTQ+ community: from Rowling's 2007 reveal that

Dumbledore—a main character in the *Harry Potter* series—is gay, to her 2014 retweet of a meme captioned "if Harry Potter taught us anything, it's that no-one should live in a closet" (qtd. in McNally). A year later, responding to criticism from the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC), Rowling wrote, "I don't care about WBC. I think it's important that scared gay kids who aren't out yet see hate speech challenged" (@jkrowling, "I don't care about WBC"). Given Rowling's support of gay rights, her disparagement of the trans community seems shockingly uncharacteristic—after all, how could someone who so actively challenges hate speech purposefully write something so hurtful?

Interestingly enough, J.K. Rowling's "Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" was *not* the first time Rowling had published a transphobic tweet. Mere months after the publication of *Sorted* in 2019, Jackson Bird published an opinion piece in *The New York Times* entitled "'Harry Potter' Helped Me Come Out as Trans, But J.K. Rowling Disappointed Me." This piece was a reaction to a tweet J.K. Rowling had posted in defense of Maya Forstater who had, in turn, "filed a lawsuit claiming [Forstater's] employer, the Center for Global Development, discriminated against her because of beliefs she has often shared on Twitter—namely, that a person cannot change their sex, and her opposition to the proposed changes to the United Kingdom's Gender Recognition Act that would allow people to legally change their gender" (Bird, "'Harry Potter' Helped Me Come Out"). At a glance, Rowling's "Forstater" tweet seems at least as transphobic as the "Wumben" tweet if not more so: "Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill" (@jk_rowling, "Dress however you please"). Unlike the "Wumben" tweet which, in its levity, downplays the significance of its subject matter, the "Forstater" tweet explicitly makes the typical anti-trans comment that "sex is real" (@jk_rowling, "Dress however you please"). Why, then, did the "Wumben" tweet cause a tidal wave of public disapproval when the "Forstater" tweet—in spite of being discussed by major publications such as *The New York Times*—did not firmly label Rowling as a transphobe?

There are many possible explanations for the "Wumben" tweet breaking the proverbial camel's back, ranging from COVID-weariness (by the time of Rowling's tweet, the world had been quarantined for several months) to Rowling's transphobia having reached a certain "critical mass." It is difficult to find one true answer to the "why Wumben?" question; more likely than not, a variety of factors came into play. One such factor is, however, easy to overlook because it lies in the nature of the tweet itself: it is the very levity which makes the "Wumben" tweet seem tamer that, in fact, angered and disappointed Rowling's fans. First and foremost, the inventive wording— "Wumben," "Wimpund," "Woomud"—is immediately reminiscent of *Harry Potter* with its "wrackspurt" (Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* 140), and "Wingardium Leviosa" (Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone* 124). By using whimsical language so similar to that of *Harry Potter*, Rowling effectively conflates the fantasy world of her creation with a

transphobic reality. If a more grounded tweet—such as Rowling's support of Forstater—would allow a reader to mentally separate Rowling from her work, the "Wumben" tweet immediately suggests that transphobia can exist within the magic of the Potterverse. The same language that caused an entire generation to fall in love with Rowling's fantastical creations had, in under 140 characters, become weaponized against the trans community.

For fans who had long considered Rowling's imaginative world a place of safety and acceptance, the "Wumben" tweet proved disillusioning: a fact remarked upon by, among others, Mallory Yu, an associate producer for NPR's *All Things Considered*. In an NPR piece several days after the tweet, Yu remarks, "you'll excuse me if it hurts personally, maybe a little too personally, that Rowling so casually mocks language that seeks to include me and other trans people." Yu, who "doesn't categorize neatly as man or woman," analyzes Rowling's dismissal of the phrase "people who menstruate" and makes the point that they are among those who are "quite literally, people who menstruate" (Yu). Yet, Rowling does not allow for this possibility. She suggests that cisgender women are a magical breed and a breed for whom the very language is endangered, as evidenced by Rowling's choice of the phrase "used to be a word for those people"?" (@jk_rowling, "Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud). As a result, Rowling sets up an "us vs. them"—a cisgender versus transgender—dichotomy that the reader becomes drawn into against their will. It is difficult to imagine Rowling would post a tweet with the express intention of alienating her fan base. Therefore, in view of the ease with which Rowling assumes a sympathetic audience, as well as what Yu notes as the lightness with which she "casually mocks" an issue that is—without exaggeration—life-or-death for trans individuals, another significant aspect of the "Wumben" tweet must be considered: the humor.

Unlike Rowling's "Forstater" tweet, which is a straightforward (albeit, transphobic) statement, the words "Wumben," "Wimpund," and "Woomud" offer another dimension to Rowling's speech. As it happens, beyond their similarity to the language of *Harry Potter*, they—as well as the entirety of Rowling's tweet—can be interpreted as a joke. Much has been written about Rowling's ability to masterfully weave together the darkest of themes with playfulness. As a passage from one of the many literary analyses of *Harry Potter* suggests, "Just as [*Harry Potter*] is both a children's and an adult's series, it is also both solemn and quite funny. The humor, too, is a part of the educational process within the book … serving both an empathetic and a cathartic function" (Pharr 65). Rowling appears to transfer her signature style onto the "Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" tweet. The terms themselves can be viewed as playful, comical distortions of the word "women." Similarly, the entire tweet plays on the irony of needing to search for a self-evident answer to an obvious question—since, in Rowling's view, "people who menstruate" *are* women, the very act of posing the question is unnecessary to the point of being absurd. Naturally, the comical merits of the tweet are questionable (and, judging by the response, many readers did not

appreciate Rowling's "humor"), yet the structure of the tweet suggests a set-up ("People who menstruate") and a punchline ("Wumben," "Wimpund," "Woomud"). Although this dissection of Rowling's tweet as a joke might seem unimportant and rather self-explanatory, it raises questions that examine the very nature of free speech. Could the "humorous" or, to use Yu's phrase once again, "casually mocking" language of the "Wumben" tweet explain why many of Rowling's fans saw it impossible to enter into a conversation with Rowling as they had during Rowling's prior transphobic remarks? Could it be possible that the tweet sparked public backlash specifically because jokes seem to be governed by a different set of rules than regular, non-humorous speech?

In order to analyze Rowling's tweets in the context of humor, it will be helpful to provide a terminology for the discussion. In her essay "'Just Joking!' The Ethics of Humour," humor philosopher Robin Tapley seeks out to define the distinctions between "morally objectionable" and "merely offensive" jokes. Tapley suggests that one of the key factors in distinguishing between the two categories is the power relationship—the "social disparity"—between the joke's teller and the subject of the joke as well as the level of "social harm" that is brought on or implied by the telling of said joke. Harm, in Tapley's view, is more a global concept rather than an individual one; for example, a joke playing on years of stereotypes of a marginalized community would constitute harm, while ridiculing a balding co-worker might just be insensitive (192). A joke that crosses the threshold into morally objectionable territory could then, according to Tapley, be subject to "social censure"—"the strongest most effective kind of disapprobation that can radiate from society at large … the highest level of disapprobation and behaviour regulation short of legal intervention" (180). First published in 2005, when social media was still in its nascent stages, much of Tapley's essay is doubly applicable to 2021's era of Twitter, partisanship, and "fake news." With that, it only seems natural to examine Rowling's online behavior through the lens of Tapley's definitions with the hopes of providing a deeper understanding of the disappointment and anger surrounding the "Wumben" situation.

As it happens, the "Wumben" tweet offers a nigh-perfect case study for Tapley's work. In Tapley's words, a "morally objectionable joke" occurs when "*a person in a dominant social position, publicly and intentionally targets some person or group who is in a subordinate social position in a way that degrades or dehumanizes that person or group*" (180, emphasis original). The similarities between Tapley's definition of what constitutes a "morally objectionable" joke and Rowling's writing are difficult to ignore. As one of the world's most celebrated, beloved, and popular writers, J.K. Rowling is a person in a dominant social position who publicly (on Twitter) and intentionally targeted trans individuals (a group in a subordinate social position) in a way that degraded and dehumanized them. It is intentional because, subject matter aside, the "Wumben" tweet was well-written. It is dehumanizing because, by claiming that only women menstruate, Rowling mocked any acknowledgement that trans, nonbinary, and

genderqueer individuals can have basic human functions (which, by its very definition, is an example of dehumanization). In other words, Rowling's "Wumben" tweet fit all the criteria necessary to be deemed morally objectionable; as a consequence, just as Tapley's writing had predicted, Rowling was subject to social censure—the proverbial "cancellation" (Rowling, "J.K. Rowling Writes"). However, although the social censure against Rowling following the "Wumben" tweet may have been an understandable response to a morally objectionable joke, the question remains as to why the "Wumben" tweet caused more uproar than the "Forstater" tweet. If anything, Tapley suggests:

> [T]he [speech problem] to be overcome in defining morally objectionable jokes, concerns the idea that because we are 'just joking' we can say anything whatsoever with moral immunity. Underlying this notion is the idea of an absolute or ideal sort of free speech protection. That is, even if we disapprove of a joke or any kind of speech, we can do nothing about it since it is 'protected speech'. (181)

While Tapley's essay proceeds to examine the "speech problem" in terms of "social disparity" and "social harm," the assumption that a joke can give a speaker *more* license to test boundaries is taken for granted. Yet, in the case of Rowling's tweets, it was the joke—the making light of a serious issue—that upset fans more than the explicit, serious "Forstater" tweet.

One possible explanation to the "Wumben" tweet's negative effect lies with, as briefly mentioned, Rowling's assumption of a sympathetic audience. In fact, Tapley's examination of the nature of jokes suggests a theory (initially proposed by philosophers and researchers Hugh LaFollette and Niall Shanks) that "*beliefs* are fundamental to humor … it is not just the having of a belief that is necessary to humor, but the contention that the belief is true" (Tapley 174-5, emphasis original). This belief need not even be held by a joke's audience, as Tapley writes: "While the beliefs couched in the jokes have to be true, they can be true in an imaginary sense. That is, the jokes can be entertained as true, without actually being believed" (175). However, as Tapley continues,

> Whether one personally holds a belief to be true is really not the point … a joke has to have content that is true in a social sense—some people in the society are known to have this belief, or the belief can be imagined to be true—rather than a personal sense, in order to be funny. (175-6)

By expecting support for a morally objectionable joke, the speaker, in a sense, demands complicity from the audience; by acknowledging the joke, the audience must also—if only for the duration of the joke—adopt a belief that would allow them to see its

humor. In the case of the "Wumben" tweet, J.K. Rowling not only made an anti-trans joke, but she expected her audience to share the beliefs required for the joke to land. This expectation was, perhaps, one of the most painful aspects of the "Wumben" tweet: not only did Rowling hold transphobic views, but she used her considerable platform to assume her followers hold the same opinions—or, at the very least, are open to considering them as true. While the "Forstater" tweet was revealing of Rowling's personal opinions, it never implied or assumed the audience's support; it was one person's view over that of a community. The "Wumben" tweet, on the other hand, suggested that Rowling's followers and *Harry Potter* fans in general – many of whom belong to the LGBTQ+ community or, at the very least, support LGBTQ+ rights – must be able to partake, to believe in Rowling's transphobic reality. This expectation of active engagement ultimately proved an insult that many of Rowling's fans were not willing to accept.

On June 10, 2020, four days after the "Wumben" tweet, Rowling released a lengthy essay defending her position. Rather than issuing an apology, Rowling doubled down on her transphobic views—suggesting that her tweets were, in fact, in defense of women's rights (Rowling, "J.K. Rowling Writes"). Among Rowling's point-by-point series of justifications for her anti-trans position (which author and trans activist Jennifer Finney Boylan referred to as a "greatest-hits list of false statements and groundless fears" in an opinion piece in *The New York Times*), two points in particular are worthy of further discussion. First, Rowling suggests that she has become the target of internet abuse for being a "Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist [TERF]" (Rowling, "J.K. Rowling Writes")—a term which Rowling seems to equate with misogyny: "people swarmed back into my timeline, assuming a right to police my speech, accuse me of hatred, call me misogynistic slurs and, above all—as every woman involved in this debate will know—TERF" (Rowling, "J.K. Rowling Writes"). A number of writers have questioned whether the term is offensive—including research suggesting that it is often specifically those accused of trans-exclusionary feminism who dislike the term, preferring to be called "gender critical" instead (Pearce et al. 681). Perhaps the most succinct response to Rowling comes from the famed gender philosopher Judith Butler: "I am not aware that TERF is used as a slur. I wonder what name self-declared feminists who wish to exclude trans women from women's spaces would be called?"

However, there was another title Rowling claimed for herself in that essay: "as a much-banned author, I'm interested in freedom of speech and have publicly defended it, even unto Donald Trump" (Rowling, "J.K. Rowling Writes"). A month after Rowling's essay, *Harper's Magazine* published "A Letter on Justice and Open Debate," an open letter defending free speech with multiple prominent authors, thinkers, and artists—including Rowling—as its signatories. The open letter echoes the sentiments in Rowling's essay, stating "While we have come to expect [the constriction of the free exchange of information and ideas] on the radical right, censoriousness is also spreading more widely in our culture: an intolerance of opposing views, a vogue for

public shaming and ostracism, and the tendency to dissolve complex policy issues in a blinding moral certainty" (Williams). Tapley suggests that "to suppose … that 'free speech' is absolute … is naïve. Free speech is not an indiscriminate blanket protection against absolutely anything" (181). Furthermore, the open letter states, as if in response, "The restriction of debate, whether by a repressive government or an intolerant society, invariably hurts those who lack power and makes everyone less capable of democratic participation" (Williams). Judging from those very words she endorsed with her signature, Rowling recognizes the harm the restriction of speech has on those who lack power, but doesn't seem to realize her "casually mocking" tweet has the same chilling effect. Perhaps, others did come to realize that. Jennifer Finney Boylan had also initially signed the *Harper's* open letter; however, upon seeing Rowling's name on it, Boylan withdrew her signature.

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GENERATING GAUDÌ:
AI AND CREATIVITY IN DESIGN

RYAN WU

The tapering pillars soar over the entrance, leaning away from the modernist Passion Facade of the Sagrada Familia. Blending natural hyperboloids with angular sculptures and organic columns, it is one of the greatest construction projects ever undertaken, a symbol of Barcelona and the incredible artistry of its architect, Antoni Gaudí. A work spanning three centuries, construction began in 1882 on the cathedral, which manages to appear modern and distinctive even alongside the 21st-century skyline its construction cranes stand amidst. One of the most unique features of the cathedral's design is its vaulted ceiling, held aloft by a forest of columns that change from polygonal to round along its length, branching and curving both for the engineering purpose of withstanding horizontal loads in a unique structural system while artistically emulating a tree canopy (Schnepp 569). The columns create a fascinating combination of the natural world replicated in stone, solving a structural problem while simultaneously converging upon an organic muse. The cathedral has been described as "one of the most original and bizarre church buildings in the world," and its "transfigurations of the Gothic" as "alternately disorienting, beautiful, and startling" (Schnepp 567, 568). Yet, the distinctions of this unique piece of architecture may not remain so for long.

Driven by the data revolution of the information age, new tools are providing engineers and architects with the ability to create parts, buildings, and structures that would otherwise have been unthinkable with traditional design practices. The technique is known as generative design: engineers provide manufacturing, cost, and material constraints to an AI which then optimizes for each given parameter using a complex algorithm to balance the constraints while ensuring the final product meets all specifications. Though the procedure itself sounds mundane, the results that are created are instantly distinctive, bearing a high degree of detail and an organic appearance resembling that of ligaments or spiderwebs. Loads are not distributed via the standard geometric beams and bars of traditional design but rather complex webs of tapering strands, connecting the component while also remaining structurally sound and greatly reducing mass (Agkathidis 17). Creations of similar algorithms have even been used by designers as works of art, like an AI-designed chair launched by Philippe Starck during Milan design week 2019 (Jordahn). Much like Gaudí's groundbreaking vision of hyperboloidal curves and branching columns, the creations of generative design appear both familiar and unnatural, blending practical use and artistic liberty in a way that defies the imagination. Even in appearance, the designs bear a striking resemblance: data-driven engineering products approach Gaudí's vision through the

same natural inspirations without ever being explicitly shown the various muses which inspired the architect.

Yet, this correspondence raises an uneasy question, one which researchers have contended with since computers were invented: Can a program ever be truly creative? This question is further complicated by generative design in particular, as the program is never explicitly judged or rewarded based on the creativity or artistry of its product but rather a set of practical manufacturing goals. The unique and unconventional solutions it provides to these problems would be considered creative if imagined by any human engineer, but unlike the engineer, the program does not know what "creative" means. As such, this raises the question of whether creativity is necessarily intentional, or can it be an emergent property of sufficiently advanced problem solving. In evaluating operational definitions of creativity, which are not skewed by inherent anthropocentrism, generative design itself appears no different from any other data processing assessment produced by a thinking human or machine. Like a spreadsheet taking in a row of numbers, the algorithm of generative design simply makes observations and creates outputs in the same way an artist might be influenced by aesthetic features in their environments and experiences. Therefore, in the absence of finer distinctions of what types of data input are required to produce a creative result, there appears to be no reason why generative design algorithms are *not* creative, though the element of determinism raises technical and philosophical questions regarding the degree to which prediction and methodology are involved in a determination of creativity or originality. In answering such questions, one gains a greater understanding of the human creative process and, most importantly, the ways these developing technologies can be harnessed to complement human ability.

A basis for tackling these definitions of creativity will be provided by professor of cognitive science Margaret Boden. Many attempts at defining creativity rest upon anthropocentric and poorly defined concepts of "intuition" and "inspiration," which Boden contends are not conducive toward a more scientific or psychological understanding of the term (Dartnall 4). She instead defines three types of creativity: "combinatorial," "exploratory," and "transformational," which seek to categorize creative thought in relation to extant ideas and the conceptual domain in which those ideas exist (Boden 348). While combinatorial creativity only produces new amalgamations of ideas previously posited, exploratory creativity yields novel ideas in the domain, and transformational creativity alters the domain completely. In this sense, both Gaudí and generative design programs are transformationally creative, adding new dimension to the solution space through wholly novel ideas that challenge established heuristics of design. Metamorphosis is a theme in Gaudi's design—from natural to geometrical forms, and also through the permutations of a theme or motif. In his branching columns and the fine webbing of a generatively designed joint, unexpected and surprising results are found which defy the limits of conventional engineering, hinting at something truly transformational (Thomas 68).

However, Boden's definition assumes knowledge of the extant conceptual domain, which is purposefully not the case for *de novo* design optimization programs or other "creative" algorithms. One such program is AlphaGo Zero, which was an AI solely trained by competing against different versions of itself in the classic board game *Go*, having only been taught the rules of the game. Unsupervised machine learning in this sense therefore must be transformationally creative under Boden's definition, regardless of the actual product, simply by virtue of not knowing the span of accepted or historical strategies prior to creating a solution. Clearly, further nuance must be added to this model of creativity to better explain these algorithms.

Dartnall expands upon Boden's definition by hypothesizing that creativity cannot merely be about combinations and existing ideas, instead focusing on the *ex nihilo* process of creation (43). Particularly since these inspirational moments are difficult to characterize in humans and result in completely new *not* combinational results, Dartnall's definition aligns closely with the experience of generative design algorithms. In humans, he hypothesizes, creativity emerges from experience in the outside world, and the process of creation redescribes these subconscious memories into conscious thoughts and mental states, which are then realized in the form of "creative" actions. In terms of conscious creation, these moments of inspiration must thus *make something out of nothing*, since the *something* previously existed only in a fragmentary and subconscious form. With regards to generative design algorithms, Dartnall's definition provides an actionable starting point for evaluating creativity due to the process of *ex nihilo* creation and the way it closely mirrors *de novo* machine learning algorithms. Functioning on a high level, these algorithms derive heuristics and strategies only from the governing laws of the problem it tries to solve.

However, Dartnall's definition introduces a new concept which Boden did not rely upon to define creativity: methodology. The connection between methodology and creativity may appear obvious. After all, just like how a recreation of a Van Gogh painting from an assembly line is completely unlike the original work in terms of creative talent, the method of "thinking" for AI should also be relevant within the consideration for the true creativity of its product. Yet, the introduction of methodology also means that creativity is a trait that can only be attributed to the *creator*, and cannot be properly determined from a product alone. This is a problematic concept in the context of AI since the black-box nature of the software makes analyzing the process of creation difficult. The organic curves and ligament structures made by generative structural design may appear unnatural and surprising to the human eye, as the Sagrada Familia strikes visitors as "bizarre" (Schnepp 567) and "fantasmagorical" (Thomas 65), but is the former truly creative?

Boden discusses these concepts of methodology in the form of four "Lovelace Questions" posed by Lady Lovelace in the 19th century in response to the computing machine of Charles Babbage (Dartnall 31). The fourth question is the critical one in this context: Can computers really be creative, or will they only *appear* creative due to

the work of a human programmer? The degree of control an AI has over its own decision making is instrumental in assessing creativity, a notion echoed by professor emeritus of history Arthur Miller who makes the distinction between symbolic and neural network AIs. He defines the former as AIs governed by the rules of Boolean logic, with innate programming determining boundaries and outlines for its eventual products, while neural networks synthesize concepts in "experimental and unpredictable" ways (Miller). Critically, in the case of neural networks, "the work springs from the machine itself without any human intervention" (Miller). From that perspective, Miller argues that neural networks fulfill the *ex nihilo* condition of creativity and satisfy the fourth Lovelace question, though not in the same way that Dartnall describes. The AI is missing the process of human redescription since there are no "subconscious" experiences for it to capture in the form of inspiration. Rather, Dartnall's redescription is remolded in the form of heuristics derived from training data, providing the muses and patterns the algorithm explicitly, rather than subconsciously, tries to emulate in its own creation. Thus, the fact that the products of neural networks are not just amalgamations of its training dataset indicates that there must be *something* transformative occurring within the neural networks. That *something* is creative redescription, in a new form.

However, unlike neural network AIs, generative design poses a unique quandary for the fourth Lovelace question. The technique has been used with great success to optimize for constraints weighted already by designers, such as balancing work style, natural light, and other factors in the design of Autodesk's new offices in Toronto (Souza). Do these constraints then also limit the creativity of the final work, having been subjected to the "programming" of the outputs of the algorithm? Andy Clark of the University of Sussex argues that it does, as most neural networks can only apply their "understanding" of a problem domain within the domain itself, and not translate it to other analogous concepts (Dartnall 66). For example, a generative topology optimization algorithm may "discover" a catenoid curve as the optimal solution to designing an arch, but it cannot generalize that knowledge to recognizing other catenoid curves or understanding *why* the curve is a general solution to these types of problems in the same way Gaudí could as an experienced architect. This challenges Boden's definition of creativity relative to a concept in a solution space: how can a concept be transformative in a solution space without the concept itself ever being identified clearly? To Clark, this is an example of the "generality constraint," which stipulates that a true creative system must be able to derive "high-level abstractions" from the training data it is presented—that it needs to not just learn but *understand* (Dartnall 78). Clark's interpretation implies that modern generative design is only creative at a surface level, presenting an appearance of deeper understanding while not being able to conclude heuristics regarding the subject it attempts to design. Since the conclusions drawn by the algorithm only pertain to the specific set of constraints or solution space it was provided with, Dartnall's process of

redescription and abstraction of latent understanding is not demonstrated by modern generative design.

However, Clark and Dartnall's definitions could also be cast as anthropocentric: is forming a deeper understanding and synthesizing concepts into a higher-level abstraction necessarily the only way to be creative? In examining this question, it is instrumental to not only look at the projects of AI, but also those of humans. British mathematician Marcus du Sautoy introduces the role of algorithms in art via a quote by jazz teacher Mark Levine:

> A great jazz solo consists of:
> 1% magic
> 99% stuff that is
> Explainable
> Analyzable
> Categorizable
> Doable (qtd. in Du Sautoy 200)

Though the origins of human creativity are difficult to describe, the primary component of many creative works is not. Transformational creativity, as Boden describes it, still exists within the context of the rules governing the work of art—Levine's 99%. To assess whether a design is creative, it is not equitable to punish an AI for that 99%, the rigid constraints so derided by Clark within which the solution is found, simply because humans do exactly the same thing. Du Sautoy goes further: quoting German mathematician Georg Nees in a response to artists who didn't believe an algorithm was capable of recreating an individual's painting style, he says, "Sure, I will be able to do this . . . Under one condition, however: you must first explicitly tell me how *you* paint" (118). In this, he indirectly responds to Dartnall's emphasis on methodology, highlighting how human creativity is even more of a black box than that of neural networks. After all, Dartnall's definition of creativity as a redescription of the subconscious experience is only a theory, and a likely untestable one with present technology. Who, then, is to say whether anything is truly creative if the processes underlying creativity could not be understood by humans?

Ironically, those same AIs which challenged human creativity may be the ones capable of rebuilding a definition of the concept itself. Du Sautoy concludes Nees' story in a description of a project to recreate a Rembrandt painting via AI, describing the algorithms used as "new tools to dig around inside the [black box] and to find new traces of patterns" (122). He argues that if humans are not able to identify what makes a great work of art great, AI might be able to do so. This concept is embodied in Ian Goodfellow's Generative Adversarial Network (GAN), which uses two dueling neural networks to competitively improve both an artistic AI and the understanding of the work of art or ground truth it seeks to emulate, such as a realistic human face or a style of painting (Giles). One neural network seeks to create the piece while the other seeks

to discriminate between "real" and computer-generated works. The product of such an arrangement is not just an AI that can emulate art, but also another that can effectively find the distinguishing qualities of a genre or artist—the 1% which Levine described as "magic." This concept is just as true of generative design engineering, where the analysis of AI-created designs challenges "what [engineers have] seen in the past and what they believe to be true," as described by Frank DeSantis, a VP at Black and Decker (*Harvard Business Review*). In this sense, the hidden biases and inclinations which make emulated work discernable to a GAN or human engineering distinct from generative design are the same type of constraints that Clark describes as prohibitive to real AI creativity. Just as the artificial limitations of weight optimization and the laws of physics reduce the solution space for an AI, so too do the irrational preferences, internal subjectivities, and corporeal limits of human designers.

A step inside Gaudí's workshop in the basement of the Sagrada Familia makes this surprising distinction clear. Without simulation or 3D modeling software, the architect constructed the catenoid curves of his masterpiece via strings and bags of sand, simulating lines of force with how gravity naturally arranged the arches and spires of the strings and mirroring them to derive the structure of the cathedral's supports (Thomas 66). The models are works of art in their own right, yet they show that even Gaudí had his preferences and constraints. His solution domain was limited by the technology of his time, and his vision functioned within the strict rules he set for himself in terms of structural design. Still, those restrictions never took away from the majesty of the final product, instead contributing to his distinct style and creative imprint. Such is the goal for creative AIs as well, only they are unburdened by the physical and mental limitations of the human artist.

Nonetheless, AI need not only expose human imperfection in the domain of true creativity. With the versatility of a human mind and the analysis of a machine one, creative work can be done that is both transformational and methodologically unique, satisfying both Boden and Dartnall's definitions for creativity. Garry Kasparov, the Russian chess grandmaster who famously lost versus IBM's Deep Blue algorithm, argues that the competitive aspect of the human-AI race is the least important of all. As "human time scales and human capabilities are rendered practically insignificant compared to accelerating technological progress," development in the ethics and use of AI should not focus on whether humans can beat them, but what happens when we inevitably lose (Kasparov 299). As such, the language of contest only serves to forestall the inevitable need to understand, work with, and improve AI as it is Sisyphean to try to fight progress and "hold on to the dying status quo" (301). What then, when AIs truly are creative? What more will we understand of art, of science, of our own minds? When the next Sagrada Familia is built with algorithms designed to artistically emulate nature while balancing engineering constraints, we will gaze at the ornate vaults and columns and understand more about the original.

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SOME TRADITIONS ARE SEXIST: SHOULD THEY STAY THAT WAY

PANNI ORBAN

When young, liberal internationalists hear the term "folklore," they likely envision a primitive, mythical experience far removed from our current conception of modernity. This notion of folklore as a phenomenon of a distant past is inaccurate, however, as it still constitutes a real and active part of many cultures around the world to this day.

In my case, born in Budapest, Hungary to Eastern European parents, yet having immigrated to Washington State when I was five, the displacement of my childhood was grounded by my affinity for Hungarian folk music. I'll admit, sometimes it eludes even me as to how I am able to love, at once, both Nirvana and *manele*, AC/DC and *csárdás*. Yet, since my dad was a well-known *primás,* a lead violinist in Transylvanian folk circles, I grew up attending *táncház,* community events where musicians and dancers gather to celebrate their Hungarian culture. Over time, I gradually shifted from being an observer to an active participant as a double bass player.

Nevertheless, my experience growing up as one of the only female musicians in male-dominated "professional" folk circles presented me with an increasingly frustrating Catch-22: the stronger the connection to my cultural roots became, the harder I found it was to reconcile my Washingtonian, progressive outlook with the more traditional customs of my native heritage. For example, in a recent conversation, my friend and fellow musician Balázs—who, like most members of the Hungarian folk community, tends to lean conservative—surprised me by asking for my opinion on whether I thought our traditional styles of dance were sexist or not.

My instinctive response to his question was "yes, of course." After all, these dances often reinforce traditional gender roles and power dynamics. For example, there is the tradition of the woman having to be "asked to dance" by the man. For fans of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, this might exude Romantic fantasies of 19th century conservatism, but, at the same time, there is nothing nostalgic about the assertion that a woman essentially cannot exist in the sphere of dance without the man first consenting to legitimize it. Furthermore, in most dances, the woman is submissive while her male partner "leads" her through a series of spontaneous choreographies. This gendered dynamic exists even in solo dances. Whereas for men they feature heavy hitting of the legs and complex rhythmic sequences to showcase the strength and skill of the dancer, there is no female equivalent except Roma-style *csingerálás* and *mahala,* which sexualize the female dancer who perpetually borders the threshold between empowerment and subjugation to the male gaze. Moreover, Hungarian women themselves indirectly empower this patriarchal cultural paradigm by consenting to be subjugated as *hagyományőrzők* ("guardians of tradition").

And yet, while my doctrinal, 21st century feminist outlook causes me to wince at the overt sexism upheld by these traditions, my passion for them prevents me from denouncing these customs as irredeemably archaic or backward. For one, the active thrill of experiencing the dance as a woman, who is energetically spun around her male counterpart, complicates the overt sexism of the gendered dance roles. In a way, the female's dynamism makes her more dominant than the man and, in the words of my friend Balázs, showcases the woman through an intimate gesture of love and respect rather than entrenching her subjugation. Additionally, the sexist dimension of Hungarian culture embedded in the dances is merely a single element of the larger *táncház* experience that intimately brings people together through the sharing of folk music, singing, food, and language. If I focused exclusively on this negative aspect, I feel that the greater beauty of these traditions would be unjustifiably ignored. Furthermore, while Hungarian folk dancing has a long-standing, historical tradition among peasant communities, the improvisational genre emerged in the 1980s as part of the reactionary movement against Soviet occupation. The traditional sexism reflected in Hungarian folk dancing should thus be understood within the context of Hungary's broader, cultural turn to conservatism at the time, which was seen as the best way to resist foreign domination. In a way, then, these dances represent more than the sexist traditions they embody—they represent the essence of "being Hungarian."

Perhaps my ambiguous feelings about my friend's question points to a greater philosophical challenge facing globalizing societies today. In Hungary's case, the main antagonist to present-day cultural conservatism is the liberal, internationalist left. Insofar as Hungarian folk dancing historically preserved national—and thus, patriarchal—culture, recent attempts to modernize it according to the well-meaning, liberal standard of universal equality have been regarded by conservative Hungarians as a direct threat to the sovereignty of their Hungarian identity. Accordingly, it appears that modern liberal internationalism often *requires* the sacrifice of cultural singularity. Paradoxically, as much as it claims to stand for the celebration of cultural pluralism, it only tolerates diversity insofar as it does not compromise Western values.

Certainly, this doesn't mean that all traditions should be left unexamined or passively condoned. The conservative Hungarian government has defended homophobic and xenophobic discourses with the same argument: "cultural preservation." The difference is that this discourse is weaponized against not just foreign intervention, but it is used to discriminate against its own population. A more nuanced reconciliation requires the abandonment of a definitive "Western cultural standard" against which all other cultures are evaluated.

With that in mind, I think there is a way to appreciate the beauty of certain traditions despite some of their inherent outdatedness. After all, by restricting disagreements to binary frameworks of sexist or non-sexist, agreeable or non-

agreeable, we may end up condemning as "wrong" entire traditions that culturally enrich the world we want to live in.

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NOW IS THE TIME TO INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

JENNA YUAN

Can you imagine going to school during a global pandemic, the worst economic recession since World War II, and escalating political uncertainty? If you're not a student right now, you can't begin to understand what learning in this historic moment is like. That is why institutionalizing youth engagement in our new federal government, and in the next Department of Education in particular, is critical right now.

Just as President Joe Biden is convening experts to tackle COVID-19, the economy, the environment, and other pressing issues our country is facing, he and his incoming Department of Education must also consult students on our educational experiences. Better than anyone, students understand the ongoing process of reimagining education during COVID-19, the obstacles we face to learning effectively, and the inequities being exacerbated by the current crises. Students are experts on schooling in this moment, so engaging us is essential to developing accurate policy priorities and appropriate solutions to the issues we are facing.

Many state and local governments have already found students' expertise invaluable across all levels of the policymaking process. In Washington, which was the first state in the U.S. to be heavily impacted by COVID-19, students like myself served on the Reopening Washington Schools 2020 Workgroup. Alongside teachers, administrators, legislators, and researchers, we were able to offer unique advice on the problems we were facing, considering everything from an appropriate grading scale for the spring semester to the steps needed to guarantee access to virtual learning for every student. In response to schools closing in March, Kentucky's Student Voice Team surveyed almost 9,500 students from across the state on their educational experiences during the pandemic. Using their data, they then pushed lawmakers to take urgent action on issues like mental health, food instability, and more.

Other agencies have already modeled what effective youth engagement initiatives within the federal government can look like. The Children's Bureau within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth, and Families hires young adults previously involved in the foster care system to serve as consultants on planning conferences, creating resources, and developing foster care-related policies. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture hosts the National 4-H Conference each year, where they convene students from across the country to propose policy solutions to concerns raised by different federal agencies.

The extensive body of successful examples at both the local and federal levels prove that there are easy, actionable models to engage students in the Department of Education as well.

The most intuitive solution is for the Secretary of Education and other important department officials to stay in consistent, rigorous, and authentic communication with students. By keeping in regular contact with diverse groups of students, especially students from marginalized groups who face the worst effects of educational inequities, the Department of Education can ensure that they are keeping their finger on the pulse of what learning actually looks like in schools today. This is especially important now, as students' educational experiences shift rapidly due to public health concerns.

In addition, the Department of Education should also take steps to institutionalize student voices in more formal ways by involving them in all the work they do. For instance, the Department of Education can reinstate the youth liaison staff position that existed under the Obama administration but was removed under Trump Education administration Secretary DeVos. The department can also ensure students are able to leverage the department's extensive grantmaking powers, all the way from creating standards for evaluation to selecting applicants. In all of the many workgroups, commissions, or convenings that they are involved in, the department can advocate for student members to be brought to the table.

President Biden has already committed to appointing a former public school teacher to be Secretary of Education. Just as he has proven to value teachers' insights about our educational system, he must value students' advice as well. We are our education system's primary stakeholders, and thus the foremost experts on how it operates. It's time that the Department of Education treats us like it.

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