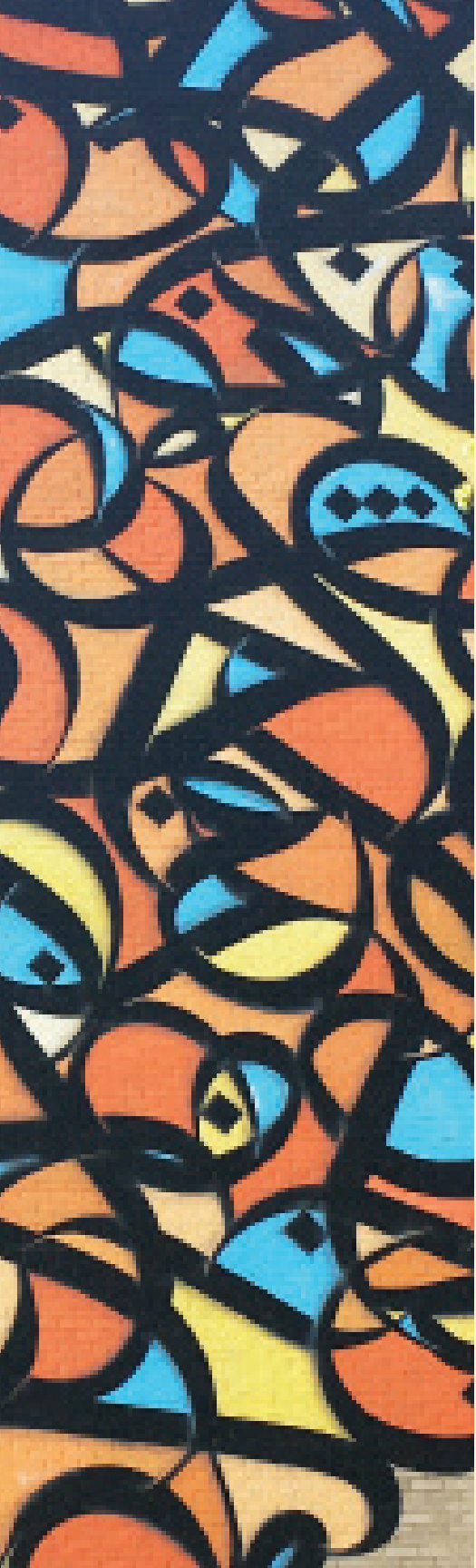

# FrameWorks

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# Breaking Artistic Boundaries: Zora Neale Hurston and the Harlem Renaissance

By Ayania Hicks

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The Harlem Renaissance is often idealized as a time in which African American writers thrived. Such accounts fail to consider dynamics within the Harlem Renaissance that at times inhibited their liberty. So, for example, Zora Neale Hurston's unique portrayals of folk life in the short story "Sweat" was misunderstood by many of her contemporaries. This article will situate the story within the intellectual debates during the Harlem Renaissance and will argue that "Sweat" evinces Hurston's insistence on artistic freedom. These dynamics will be considered through the metaphor of a *creative wall* which excluded creative expression that did not conform to preordained political principles.

A product of the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance resulted in the creation of extraordinary works of literature, art, and music. For decades in the early 20th century, Harlem became a sort of "Black capitol" (Boi 706). This creative explosion marked renewed vigor in artistic expression for African Americans following the Reconstruction era. Some influential members of the Harlem intelligentsia sought to politicize the artistic process, and in so doing revealed a divide between generations of African American writers. According to Amritjit Singh, the "aesthetic legacy" (498) of the Harlem Renaissance is best observed in the divide created by the opposing ideas of sociologist W.E.B Du Bois, writer Alain Locke, and the younger writers working around them. The attempt to establish an African American literary aesthetic took the form of a negotiation between politically motivated creative limitations and an insistence on unfettered creativity.

Although Du Bois's political and social contributions solidified him as an influential Black figure of the early 20th century, his political ideals created limitations for Black writers during the Harlem Renaissance. As editor of the

NAACP's magazine *Crisis*, Du Bois was particular about the kind of work that he published. Although *Crisis* granted the works of Black writers more mainstream attention, Du Bois used this position to "espouse his ideological interests" (Davis 764) as outlined in his "Talented Tenth" essay. In the "Talented Tenth" Du Bois asserted that the African American race would be saved by its "exceptional men" (33). Although a well-intentioned assertion, this created a clear class and gender divide. Arguing that the "best" of the race would lead the masses away from "contamination of the worst" furthered this divide as Du Bois privileged groups within the community he deemed "acceptable." Glasker argued that Du Bois's demand for an exceptional group meant developing a "right type" (493) of African American who fit the criteria of being college educated and middle-class. This was exclusionary because the majority of the African American community did not fit this ideal. Nonetheless, *Crisis* functioned as a tool to promote this notion through its essays, poems, and short stories.

As the premier publication for African American writers, *Crisis* required contributors to advance Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" ideology. Intending to use *Crisis* to challenge the harmful stereotypes promoted by White publications, Du Bois in effect hindered the artistic expression of many younger Harlem Renaissance writers. His editorial policy was built on an inherently exclusionary logic, walling off the diverse experiences of African Americans that did not fit the "Talented Tenth" ideal.

As the Harlem Renaissance progressed, Alain Locke began challenging Du Bois's inhibiting ideology. He published *The New Negro,* an anthology with contributions intent on challenging the previous decade of repressive discourse on artistic expression. Contributors to the anthology penned works that represented a new progressive Black creative. "The New Negro" accommodated the full complexity of the African American experience. Contrary to Du Bois's demand for a group of "exceptional" individuals to facilitate a change within the African American community, the "New Negro" rejected being "helped up" or "worried over" (Locke 3). Instead of aiming for social and economic freedom via the education of a select few, the "New Negro" trusted in art to achieve equality. This group of writers were intent on rejecting the ideals of the bourgeois intellectuals while still insisting on equal rights (Nerad 1018). By opting to create art that displayed the African American community in all its "faults and shortcomings" (Locke 11) Locke's call was less restrictive than Du Bois's. It did not, erase African American masses who were not "exceptional," as Du Bois did in his fruitless grasp for acceptance. Instead, the "New Negro" intended to use Black culture, however it may present itself, as a "political weapon" (Singh 498).

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[1]Du Bois promoted works by, for example, artist Jessie Redmon Fauset's "There is Confusion," which portrays the "Talented Tenth" with characters who are "well-born black Philadelphians" (Glasker 489).

Weaponizing Black culture in the fight for equality could be achieved through what Locke referred to as "group expression" (7), which required artists to write primarily in the interests of political outcomes. The result was a literary form in which African Americans served as political allegories rather than characters in their own right. Ultimately however, the concept of a "New Negro" nurtured the formation of a new group of writers with creative ideals that would transcend even Locke's aesthetic directives.

As the "New Negro" movement gained prominence, Du Bois released a series in *Crisis* implicitly critiquing Locke. "The Negro Art Symposium," released over seven issues, posed a series of questions to Harlem Renaissance creatives:

> When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray? Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or best characters of a group? Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them? (*Crisis* 219)

Du Bois did not initially provide any answers to his questions regarding the writers' "obligation" to the "sort of character" they produce (Crisis 219). Nevertheless, the tone of his questions points to his disconnect from younger Black writers. While Locke encouraged "New Negro" artists to create work that reflected the entirety of the African American experience, Du Bois's questions conveyed disapproval of this. These questions point to Du Bois's belief that young writers were guilty of "political irresponsibility" as they favored tales of "low down black people" (Campbell 314). Therefore, Du Bois suggests, even if a writer's "tales" offered realistic accounts of the African American experience they should be disregarded if they contributed to negative perceptions of the Black community. He expected writers to focus their artistic talents on uplifting the exceptional ideals presented in the "Talented Tenth."

However, younger artists were creating work that represented the African American culture in all its diversity. This meant sometimes focusing on the "low down" aspects of the culture to represent their unique experiences. "The Negro Art Symposium," while giving the impression of initiating an open discussion regarding creativity, had the effect of building an exclusionary "creative wall." Artists unwilling to conform to its political and aesthetic

conventions were left standing on the other side. This was all the encouragement many young artists needed to resist.

Months after "The Negro Art Symposium" began publication, Langston Hughes released an article outlining an unconfined approach to artistic expression. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes dismissed Locke's ideas of group expression as a means to social and political gains. He affirmed that younger artists should aim to express their "individual selves without fear or shame" (Hughes). Finding Locke's ideas somewhat "overbearing," he was even more opposed to the "programmatic and promotional" ideals supported by Du Bois (Singh 497). Hughes demanded that writers "escape [rather than conform to] the restrictions" (Hughes) in exchange for acceptance.

Despite its shortcomings, Hughes conceded that Locke's "New Negro" paradigm served as a point of departure for his own aesthetic ideals. He was welcoming of the "low-down" folks, Locke championed but whom Du Bois considered a "danger" (Hughes). Insisting on the "existence of a distinct African American aesthetic" (De Santis 589), this amounted to a declaration of independent creative freedom for African American writers. As a creative manifesto, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" marked a refusal to bolster Du Bois's create wall.

In a final effort to define his restrictive aesthetic, Du Bois published a speech: "Criteria of Negro Art." Asserting that art was critical in the "great fight" for African Americans becoming "full-fledged Americans," Du Bois again called for the strict politicizing of Black art ("Criteria of Negro Art"). Arguing the necessity of his creative wall, Du Bois asserted that all art was "propaganda" and that he did not "care a damn" for anything otherwise ("Criteria of Negro Art"). This further excluded art that did not function as a mouthpiece to advance his political ideology. Even more damagingly, Du Bois's assertion assumed that White people were the "intended audience" (Carroll 704) thereby disregarding an African American readership. Inevitably, artists occupying the avant-garde space outside of Du Bois's prescriptive wall radically opposed the concept of creating art with White readers as the ultimate judge. For them, Du Boisian prohibitions tailored simplified African American characters for White readers, which disallowed the full range and complexity of African American experiences. For Du Bois, art did not function as a means of expression, but as a "tool for race-building" (Wilhelm 1157), therefore a "negative" depiction of African American culture would not assist in his fight for equality.

In response, young writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Wallace Thurman formed a collective of radical Black writers. Performing their radicalism with the name "The Niggeratti," the group produced the

journal *Fire!!* and nourished the artistic freedoms inhibited by Du Bois. Aiming to "ignite the consciousness of its readers," these writers made "the folk" the essence of their inspiration (Davis 765). Liberated from any pre-packaged political agenda, contributors explored themes of homosexuality, prostitution, and domestic violence (Wirth). Telling the stories of people at risk of erasure by Du Bois's creative limitations, gave these writers space to critique and explore valuable experiences. Additionally, refusing sponsorship by organizations with political objectives gave the artists freedom to consider the experiences of Black people that were not considered "acceptable" (Wirth).

Unlike *Crisis, Fire!!* attempted to "shock traditional sensibilities" by depicting African American culture, "warts and all" (Glasker 491). In refusing to solely portray the culture in a positive light, these artists in fact gained a "wealth of material" (Hughes). *Fire!!* contributors dismissed the strategy of "sanitizing" African American culture and instead dignified the "seedier" elements of their own communities (O'Hara 395). Furthermore, contributors were free to create work reflecting their individual experiences rather than conforming to a group aesthetic. Although the journal only published one issue before the headquarters ironically burned in a fire, it established a counterculture.

Zora Neale Hurston's short story "Sweat" graced the pages of *Fire!!* and evinced her own refusal to fortify Du Bois's wall. Containing direct references to Hurston's hometown, the text encompassed not only the principles of *Fire!!* but showed the quality of work created when the writer's ideas were prioritized. The journal aimed to be "radical" and "provocative" and Hurston's story achieved those objectives in its usage of folk dialect (O'Hara 394). With the protagonist Delia working as a washerwoman and spending her days cleaning the clothes of wealthy white people, there is an outright rejection of the "Talented Tenth" image of an educated middle class African American. Further, Delia's husband Sykes, an unemployed adulterer, stands in stark opposition to the bourgeois image of an upstanding man. The two are combative throughout the text as they engage in a power struggle over the home paid for with Delia's earnings. Attempting to gain ownership over the house, Sykes places a venomous snake as a trap in the home. Ultimately Delia avoids the snake by fleeing outdoors, leaving Sykes to wrongly assume that he has reign over the house. As revenge for years of abuse, Delia refuses to help when Sykes is bitten by the snake.

Read in tandem with Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road: A Memoir,* "Sweat" contains striking parallels to Hurston's own upbringing in the impoverished all-Black town of Eatonville. The setting and characters are not "political allegories" as Locke prescribed, but are drawn from lived experience. This

should not be understood to imply that "Sweat" is apolitical. Rather, it suggests Hurston's more nuanced political approach: she does not exclude "folk" nor sacrifice individuality for political ends. Rather, the story reveals the ways in which personal experiences *are* political. The story begins with the line, "It was eleven O'clock of a Spring night in Florida" (Hurston, "Sweat" 40), which establishes a context with which Hurston would have been deeply familiar. Using Eatonville as a "backdrop" (Samuels 244), the story is enriched by the affinity Hurston had for her hometown. When, for example, the village men state that Sykes met his mistress, Bertha, "ovah Apopkah" (Hurston, "Sweat" 42), a town which is only 20 minutes from Eatonville, Hurston's detailed knowledge lends an undeniable realism. Hurston dismisses the creative boundaries imposed by Du Bois in depicting a setting with which she is familiar, instead of one that would be considered "accessible" to white readers.

"Sweat" further represents Hurston's personal experience as she modeled characters after real individuals with whom she grew up. In the short story, Hurston wrote that the village men sat on the porch of Joe Clarke's store chewing cane "listlessly" (41). Similarly, in *Dust Tracks,* Hurston wrote that the real-life Joe Clarke's store was the "heart and spring" (61) of Eatonville. Through such allusions, Hurston sought to "preserve and present" her culture in "written form" (Sartwell 374). In the short story, the village men gossip about Delia's and Sykes' relationship just as the men of Hurston's childhood discussed the indiscreet "nuances of life" (*Dust Tracks* 62). So, Hurston took on the responsibility of "telling the tales" (Sartwell 369) of the folk in the village, even if it did not bolster Du Bois's or Locke's political agendas. Hurston dignified the ordinary Black characters of her youth, just as Du Bois sought to elevate the "Talented Tenth." Setting the story in an isolated all-Black town illustrates the complexity, diversity, challenges, and triumphs of the Black community. If Du Bois courted the favorable opinions of the mainstream to prove that Black people could be "fully-fledged" Americans, Hurston asserts the wholeness of African American identity independent of the opinions of privileged outsiders.

Aside from allusions to her hometown, Hurston wrote her characters' dialogue in a thick Southern dialect. She argued in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" that such dialects were not distracting in literary settings, but that they were necessary to recognizing the "richness of the tongue" (67). In response to the frequent uninspired critique of Hurston's use of dialect as an appeal to stereotype, Sartwell remarks that Hurston took "great glee" in crafting these dialects (360). Therefore, when Elijah Mosely says, "We'se all sufferin' wid de heat," ("Sweat" 42) it is important to remember that Hurston's use of dialect was done intentionally and painstakingly. This functioned to

capture the voice of a culture threatened by the restrictive aesthetics promoted by Du Bois.

In "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Hurston upheld the ways African Americans in the South talk as having done "wonders" for the English Language (51). Hurston deliberately utilized dialect to "report the raucous sayings and doings" (Plant 69) of African American folk. Although it takes great attention to read, "a watermelon is jes' whut Ah needs tuh cure de eppizudicks" (Hurston, "Sweat" 42), it is imperative to consider that Hurston wrote with respect for the expressions of African Americans from the South. Furthermore, when translated, Hurston's dialect reveals something even greater about her characters. "Eppizudicks" is a play on the word Epizootic, which is "an epidemic disease in an animal population," especially in high density animal populations such as livestock (Shiel, *Definition of Epizootic*). In one reading, by comparing himself to an animal, the character could be revealing the internalized racism which is the legacy of slavery. In another reading, the sentence evokes the residue of slavery's dehumanizing logic in "Negro expression." Rather than impose political implications on her African American characters, Hurston reveals the political inherent to the experience of her folk and their language.

Hurston's portrayal of complex gender dynamics in the text also indicate a nuanced political vision. When Sykes threatens to "put mah fist upside" Delia's "head" (Hurston, "Sweat" 40) he establishes the volatile nature of their relationship. Again, Hurston's work parallels her experiences from her own upbringing. Hurston's father, John, would threaten to "wring a chair" (*Dust Tracks* 25) over her mother's head, which is similar to Sykes' intimidation of Delia. Hurston goes further than drawing on personal experience. When Sykes threatens Delia with a bullwhip and "glares down at her" (Hurston, "Sweat" 40) he resembles a cruel overseer. The master-slave power dynamic is shown in the relationship between an African-American husband and wife. Clearly, Hurston is more interested in a "scathing criticism of misogyny and sexism" (Varlack 113) than in perpetuating Du Bois's righteous image of the African American family.

Delia's changing nature in the text illustrates a comprehensive portrait of life in which women are not only submissive but also tenacious. As the single dynamic character in the text, Delia's characterization is initially submissive but shifts into one of strength. In the beginning of the text, Delia's "habitual meekness" (Hurston, "Sweat" 40) prevents her from standing up to Sykes. Presenting Delia as a passive woman is an appeal to the expectation that women are to be submissive to their husbands. While Sykes kicks Delia's clean work around, she simply walks "calmly around him" and begins to "re-

sort things" (40). This is a representation of the too frequent historical "role of women" (Samuels 240). Transcending her submissive nature, when Sykes threatens Delia with physical violence, she grabs an iron skillet from the stove and stands in a "defensive pose" ("Sweat" 40). As Varlack indicates, Delia does not remain "frail and fragile" but she gains a sense of "voice and the strength" to defend herself against Sykes' abuse (Varlack 111). This is reminiscent of Hurston's own witness to her mother, Lucy's, strength during childhood as she refused to allow John to "whip" her "mentally" (*Dust Tracks* 92).

The relationship between Delia and Sykes reaches a climax when she bravely states, "gwan 'way fum me an' mah house." ("Sweat" 43). This represents a "quest for female empowerment" (Samuels 240). Her progression from meek to strong symbolizes a defiance of the expectation that women submit to their husbands or that slaves submit to their masters. While Du Bois's mandates anticipated portraits of "exceptional men," Delia's portrayal speaks to the strength and resolve of an ordinary woman who must emancipate herself from her abuser.

And yet, Sykes is not merely an allegory for historical perpetrators of violence against those they judge inferior. Undoubtedly, Sykes contradicts Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" mandates. However, he is also grounded in characters Hurston knew. Like Hurston's father who had his "share" of weaknesses (Dust Tracks 16), Sykes is an adulterer seen "grinnin' at every 'oman dat passes" ("Sweat" 41). Like Hurston's uncle he who remarked that if a woman had anything "big enough to sit on" she also had something "big enough to hit on" (*Dust Tracks* 22), Sykes brags that he "bominates uh skinny 'oman" ("Sweat" 42).

Naysayers might argue that Sykes propagates the stereotype of an oversexualized African-American man. Indeed, depicting Sykes as unemployed and an adulterer does not function well as a tool for pro-African-American propaganda. However, Hurston's own experience makes clear that people like Sykes existed within the African American community even if Du Bois aimed to erase them. Hurston's portrayal of Sykes is not ideal, but it is honest. It validates the experiences of those who are not "exceptional."

The Harlem Renaissance facilitated the creative expression of African American artists in a society that doubted their humanity. Du Bois's position was that African Americans had to earn their humanity by being exceptional. Hurston believed that humanity was inherent to all African Americans regardless of their status or achievements. Hurston and "the Niggerati" drew their inspiration from ordinary lives and insisted that African-American experience speak for itself. It was in this spirit that Hurston's "Sweat" found refuge in *Fire!!.*

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# Reading Kafka in the Age of Trump

By Paulina Ezquerra

Time and time again, the word "Kafkaesque" is used to describe the Trump administration. A simple Google search of the words "Trump" and "Kafkaesque" brings up about 178, 000 results, with articles bearing titles such as "What Would Kafka say about Trump's Kafkaesque White House" (Brown) or "Advisers Struggle to Obey Trump's Kafkaesque Rules" (Parker and Rucker). The overarching sentiment of many of these articles is that the Trump administration, and more often President Trump himself, act in absurd, superfluous, and contradictory ways. Others draw parallels between the suspension and inversion of rules in Kafka's work and President Trump's disregard for the norms and guidelines to which the rest of us subscribe.

But such popular uses of the word "Kafkaesque" seem amiss of a key difference between Kafka's works and the machinations of Trump's government. Whereas in the Kafkaesque it is almost never altogether clear why individuals are subjected to distressing experiences by oppressive bureaucratic powers, Trump's administration, in fulfilling the populist rhetoric of its figurehead, is quite transparent about the ideology that supports its policies towards immigrants, this article's primary concern. Indeed, that ideology is widely and proudly pronounced–chanted, even.[1] Despite this, however, this article will argue that there is something Kafkaesque about Trump's administration: an unsettling quality that sets it apart from those of previous presidents.

The aim of this paper is to examine what it is about Trump's rhetoric and his administration's policies towards immigrants that warrants the description "Kafkaesque." I argue that the Kafkaesque nature of the Trump administration's policies on immigration is to be understood less as a feature of Trump's populist leadership (though that certainly contributes to it), but, rather, in the experience of immigrants coming to the United States. The

process they must endure to justify their entry and legitimacy resembles the experience of the individual trapped and persecuted in a Kafka novel: they are subject to a system that purports neutrality but sews uncertainty, distrust, and fear through its strategic opaqueness.

Kafka's victims of bureaucracy, and particularly K. in *The Castle*, are useful allegorical figures for understanding the experience of immigrants coming to the United States. K. arrives in a village of unreceptive strangers. He applies for permission to work, marry, and join their community, but is kept in the dark and tortured by the system's (represented by the Castle) ambivalence and the villagers' hostility toward him. Without official legitimacy, K. becomes isolated and alienated. In the system but not legitimated by it, K.'s existence is liminal, as if he is trapped within the very wall that excludes him. He is reduced to a state of both being and not being: being, because he exists as a human that has a right to take up space, and not being, because that right is perpetually and unaccountably withheld by an opaque system ostensibly in the service of villagers that see him as a stranger.

Benedict Anderson's definition of "nationalism" is useful for understanding the broader allegorical power of K.'s exclusion. Anderson argues that nations are imagined political communities. It is important to recognize that Anderson is careful to distinguish his use of the word "imagined" from the implications of falsehood or fabrication. For him, the *fact* of nationalisms is not undermined by their constructedness. Instead, the "style" of their constructedness allows scholars to distinguish them from each other (Anderson 6).

The community of a nation is "imagined" because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Citizens experience nationalism as a sort of shared essential quality, which bestows affection towards their fellow citizens, as though they are closely connected to them in some profound if intangible way. The nation is further imagined ("constructed") to have a particular and unique set of characteristics, or identity, so that "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each," citizens, in sharing that identity, share a "deep, horizontal comradeship" (7).

Crucially, however, the nation is imagined as limited; it does not consider itself "coterminous with [hu]mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet" (7). Anderson's analysis suggests that nationalism is fundamentally exclusionary, even as the criteria for insider and outsider status are largely figurative. And yet *literal* borders keep "citizens"

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[1] See Rebecca Morin's "A Quick History of Trump's Evolving Justifications for a Border Wall" for an analysis of the populist "Build the Wall" slogan.

in and "foreign others" out. The border thus becomes a site of negotiation at which those who wish to cross over and materially benefit from the nation's political community must prove their figurative worth.

This is where byzantine, opaque bureaucracy is a weapon of cruelty. Immigrants – strangers like K. – can move neither forward nor backward. [2] They must dwell in a state of uncertainty and fear, neither inside nor outside the constructed borders that protect an imagined political community. They are, in other words, "enmured," enclosed within the bordering space – justifying their worthiness for entry to a system ostensibly built to treat them fairly, equally, with neutrality, but one that lacks transparency. To confine immigrants to this liminal space is to dehumanize them – they are homeless, awaiting legitimation, and given the seemingly interminable nature of their subjection, struggling to maintain hope.

If the Trump administration is not singlehandedly responsible for putting together the United States' immigration system and policies, the President's nationalistic, anti-immigrant rhetoric, along with attempts to strip immigrants of legal protections, has intensified the Kafkaesqueness of immigrant experience. The campaign for a wall along the Southern Border was built on stereotypes of immigrants as criminal aliens that must be kept out at all costs. Trump's rhetoric, as well as his administration's actions, make clear that the immigration system's opaqueness does not serve principles of fairness or neutrality, but that it hides a bureaucracy that works to keep them out. Immigrants, like K., exist in a state of limbo in which nothing is certain, other than the fact that they are not welcome.

The Trump administration and the powers in *The Castl*e are different. The former lays their ideology bare. The latter does not. Like the bureaucracy in the novel, however, the immigration system is not transparent in its administrative processes, and so against all evidence to the contrary, K and many stuck in the American immigration system fervently hold on to the hope that something good will come of it.

## Kafka's *The Castle* as Immigration Narrative

In Kafka's The Trial, a priest tells the novel's protagonist, Josef K., a parable entitled "Before the Law." A man approaches the gate that leads to "the Law." He finds a gatekeeper who tells him he cannot, at that moment, enter. He could defy the gatekeeper and enter the Law by force, but the gatekeeper warns that if he were to do this, he would only find more and more gates and gatekeepers, each keeper more terrifying than the last. The man, the priest tells Josef K., "did not expect such difficulties; the Law is supposed to be available to everyone and at all times" (*The Trial* 154). The man, the parable

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[2] Many immigrants come to the United States seeking economic opportunity or fleeing organized crime, violence, and dire violence, and thus, are unable to return to their home countries safely (See Nicholson 2017).

goes, takes another look at the gatekeeper "with his large pointed nose, his long, thin, black Tartar moustache, [and] he decides he had better wait" (154). He sits down and waits for the rest of his life. He never reaches the Law. The door, intended just for his entrance, remains closed for all eternity.

A similar story is embedded within Kafka's short story "The Great Wall of China." An imperial messenger, summoned by the dying emperor, is asked to communicate the emperor's final remarks to the people of China. Though the message is of utmost importance, the messenger is never able to deliver it, because he never completes his journey out of the palace. The chambers within the palace are endless, and even if he managed to move past them, "the courts would still have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; and once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years" ("Great Wall" 244).

Evidently, a theme Kafka weaves through these stories and others is that "the Law" is elusive. Those seeking it must wait or subject themselves to endless pointless steps. Those who carry word of the Law cannot navigate their way to those who must hear it. The experience of the Kafkaesque is characterized by shifting goalposts and perpetual deferral.

In "Waiting Before the Law: Kafka on the Border," Henk Van Houtum understands Kafka's "Law" to be the "transcription of the societal habitus": that is, of the "modes of conduct and the ethics of being" that a nation's citizens internalize as the particular order of things for their society (289). Like Anderson's imagined political community – a constructed, figurative image sustained in the minds of the citizenry – Van Houtum argues that the Law is "of our own making, not accomplished by force, but with our conscious minds and hearts" (289). Like Anderson's nationalism, however, citizens experience the Law as some kind of essential quality that sets them apart, even as it is imagined and constructed.

The Law represents the modes and incontrovertible ethics of which a political community approves. So, for example, an ideal America holds to the "self-evident" truth of equality, and the outlook, politics, and actions of its citizens speak to their incontrovertible faith in that truth. The notion of access to the Law implies that the stranger can transition to the unthreateningly familiar (*unthreateningly* familiar as opposed to assimilated; America accommodates differences but not claims to superiority). Access to the Law would allow them to make "the promise of good behavior, [to] internaliz[e] the dominant order," thereby earning "the promise of final appreciation by the Other" (290) whose number the stranger seeks to join.

But only those who already belong to the community, who "inherently" know, contribute to, and sustain the dominant order, have access to the

Law. Withholding the Law from strangers sustains the purity of the national character, just as borders preserve the meaning, sacredness, and order of its territory from those that "threaten" it. The gatekeepers and gates in *The Trial's* parable, and the unnavigable palace in "Great Wall of China," are suggestive of the impenetrable logic by which the Law is held sacred: those from without have no access, those within, though they have access, have no way out. This logic sustains the nation in a way that is meant to last for eternity. Van Houtum quotes philosopher Peter Sloterdijk who argues that borders represent the proclamation of "a big NO against the death of the nation" (291).

The consequence is a utopian desire for those that form a part of the political community, and "dystopian consequences for those who are kept outside the b/order" (291). Those waiting outside the Law, like the man in Kafka's parable, "necessarily live in a condition of not yet and never will be," (292) sentenced to a lifetime of imprisonment, "waiting for the Law to be merciful, waiting for the gates to be opened" (295). Thus, the foreign subject is understood and treated as a category, as an entity that seeks entrance to the Law, and as a threat, as a potential danger to the purity and order of the nation. Those that believe in the constructed and imagined political community see bordering, the physical and figurative containment of the nation and its order (the Law), as a way to "gain some control over the complexities of life," and as such, "borders must therefore be seen as a strategic effort of fixation, of distanciation, of gaining control in order to achieve ease" (291).

The man waiting before the Law and the imperial messenger are, in other words, Kafkaesque victims, stuck behind figurative and physical boundaries that keep them from accessing that which promises order and belonging. The protagonist of *The Castle*, K., is also kept from accessing the Law. In his search for order and belonging, he encounters resistance from villagers and village officials alike. While he lives in the village, K. is not allowed to belong. In this way, there are analogies to be drawn between K. and immigrants within the United States who must navigate the intertwined challenges of attaining social and bureaucratic legitimacy; DACA recipients, people transitioning from work visas to Green Cards, or even those undergoing naturalization processes. It is their experience that most closely resembles K.'s.

In the novel, *The Castle*, the center of bureaucratic power, summons K. to serve as a land surveyor. After his long and tiresome journey, he falls asleep on the floor of an inn, only to be woken up by a young man demanding that he have a permit in order to spend the night there. The young man and K. begin to argue. K. attempts to justify his presence to the villager: "I'm the land surveyor, and the count sent for me" (Kafka 6). When the young man calls the Castle to confirm this claim, he describes K. as "a man of very rag-

ged appearance in his thirties, sleeping peacefully on a straw mattress, with a tiny rucksack as a pillow and a gnarled walking-stick within reach," and so, "naturally," the young man "felt suspicious" (7). K.'s appearance, as described here, does not seem threatening enough to foster suspicion in the young man. If anything, K. seems vulnerable, though it is the young man who claims feels vulnerability. In Van Houtum's analysis, the young man's response to and description of K. reflects the resistance that those living within the constructed and physical border show toward those that come and ask for entrance. He is suspicious of K. not because K. looks like a threat, but because he is unknown and thus threatens the established order of the political community.

Indeed, throughout the novel, the villagers refer to K. simply as "the stranger," for that is all they see. As one of the villagers tells K.: "you're probably surprised to find us so inhospitable… but hospitality isn't a custom here, and we don't need any visitors" (15). Those that have internalized the Law and what it promises – that is, those who reside within the nation – see the foreign subject as a threat to its stability. Thus, hospitality is not a custom in the village. As Benedict Anderson notes, the imagined community is sovereign and limited.

It becomes clear that K's services are not welcome. He is told that the only way he can resolve his situation (being summoned for a job and then being told to leave) is to go up to the Castle and get a permit. There, an official tells him he cannot have it, "not tomorrow nor any other time either" (21). Because the Castle does not acknowledge K. (despite their summons) the villagers do not accept him either. As the landlady of the village inn says to him, "you're not from the castle, you're not from the village, you're *nothing.* Unfortunately, however, you are a stranger, a superfluous person getting in every one's way..." (46).[4] Without recognition from the Castle, the village, and without access to the Law, K. is *nothing* but a threat, stuck, extant to himself but beneath acknowledgement to others.

Throughout the novel, K. attempts to communicate with the Castle to be allowed to collect a permit. He sends Barnabas, who is employed by the Castle as a messenger, to speak and plead on his behalf but the messages never get through. This drives K. into a deep despair, one observed and even shared by Barnabas's sister, Olga, who witnesses her brother's struggles as a messenger: "the journey will probably be futile, the day will probably be wasted, the hope will probably be in vain. What's the point of it?" (158). Indeed, Olga's observations about her brothers' job as messenger for an arcane system in which information either gets lost or ignored, speak to the futility of K.'s situation. Later, she tells K. her brother's "pointless standing about and waiting day after day, always starting over again without any prospect of change, will wear a

[4] My italics.

man down and make him doubtful, and ultimately incapable of anything but that despairing standing about" (199). For K., waiting day after day for his messages to be delivered, to be acknowledge by the Castle, wears him down, makes him doubtful, and exhausts him.

His gradual disillusionment begins earlier in the novel. It is initially evident in a conversation with the village's Mayor, a lowly bureaucrat and not, as one might assume, the village's highest authority. The Mayor tells K. that the prospects of his case being addressed are quite slim, because the Castle's deeply complex bureaucracy means documents and decrees are often lost, ignored, or confused (56-57). K. is entertained by this because, he says, of "the insight it gives [him] into the ridiculous confusion, which, in some circumstances, can determine the course of a man's life" (59). K. recognizes that he is asking for answers from a system that does not offer them, because it is designed in such a way that "everything is very confused and nothing can be solved" (68). Not only does the village community reject him, but the system that should grant him access to it is built to ensure his case is never solved, that he can never fully assimilate because he will never be fully legitimated.

In the end, the position of the trapped Kafkaesque victim in this liminal space transforms their psyche: they cannot belong and so cannot be rid of their anxiety and vulnerability. If, as Van Houtum argues, the nation builds figurative and physical borders to keep those living within them at ease (291), it fundamentally deprives outsiders of that tranquility.

K.'s anxiety is heightened because as much as he is unwelcome in the village, he also cannot return home. K. has invested a lot in the life he is trying to live there, going so far as to become engaged, a clear attempt to establish familial comforts. As he tells the Mayor, he must stay because of "the sacrifices [he] made to leave [his] home; [his] long and difficult journey; [his] well-founded hopes of [his] appointment here; [his] complete lack of means; the impossibility of finding suitable work at home now and last but not least [his] fiancée, who comes from this village" (68). K. tells the mayor that he wants to be able to stay and thrive, not as "tokens of favour from the Castle," but as a fulfillment of rights.

Indeed, these are basic *human* rights: the right to work, to marry, to live under all the protections afforded to citizens. The fact that K. must fight for them makes clear that the nation does not consider itself "coterminous with [all of hum]mankind." The things K. wants, the fulfillment of basic human needs, desires, and rights, are afforded only to those living under the protection of the political community. But the Mayor dismisses K. from his home, and the rest of the Castle's officials follow suit. K., fundamentally, cannot argue his humanity to the Castle, because they refuse to see him in per-

son. Though K. *does* meet various seemingly important officials, he remains completely disconnected from the Castle's highest authority. Though he enters various grand offices, he never enters the Castle. The Castle refuses K.'s embodied presence, keeping him at a bureaucratic distance: he is an abstract quantity, an administrative inconvenience.

The implications for K. are not abstract, however. Though he works as a janitor for the village's local school and gets engaged to one of the village women, K cannot fully assimilate into their community. He lives in a state of perpetual flux to the extent that even his most intimate relationship, that with his fiancée, cannot survive the strain. As one of the village-women says of K.: "He is nothing, it is pitiful to see his position. He is a land surveyor, well, perhaps that is something… but if there's nothing you can do with that training then it means nothing" (259). Again, K. is described as offering "nothing." The novel affirms K.'s "nothingness" repeatedly. Indeed, K. is not allowed to fully be. If he exists on paper, it is on documents to which he is refused access, and so, not knowing his status, he has none. He is a perpetual stranger who cannot go home, and whose prior life experience and skill sets are deemed inconsequential. Because he cannot move from this liminal position, K is nothing. He exists without existing.

The novel ends midsentence. Neither the reader nor K. ever find clarity about the case. While Kafka died before completing the novel, it remains a deeply resonant ending. It implies the endlessness of K.'s subjection. According to Max Brod, one of Kafka's dearest friends who published many of Kafka's works after his death, Kafka intended the novel to end with K. exhausting himself to death seeking answers; and only then, posthumously, when he no longer represents a threat to the Law, does he receive a permit to stay in the village (Franklin).

**A Kafkaesque Immigration System**

K.s experience most directly speaks to the alienation and dissonance of immigrants inside the United States. However, the Kafkaesque extends to the experience of those who are even more vulnerable and whose positions are more tenuous: those seeking asylum or protections from human rights violations, those in detention centers at the Southern Border.

Both in pronouncing the need for a border wall during his campaign, and in pushing for its construction during his term, President Trump has made claims about immigrants and immigration that have proved, overwhelmingly, to be false.[5] His campaign slogans – "Make America Great Again," and "Drain the Swamp," conveyed his plans for improving the economy and fixing the government's systemic problems. But it was "Build the Wall" that captured the

[5]See Rizzo for a fact check analysis of Trump's claims regarding immigration.

imagination of his base: the ultimate symbol of the candidate's plan to keep Mexicans – viciously conflated in his rhetoric with "rapists" and "murderers" – from threatening American lives and livelihoods (Campbell 2018). Filling the auditoriums and stadiums where Trump held his rallies, crowds chanted "Build the Wall" during the 2016 election and, remarkably, continue to do so three years after Trump's victory.

Yet the absurdity of Trump's border wall movement does not merely reside in the chant, or even its actual construction. The United States Border Patrol has, after all, been building and maintaining barriers since the 1990's (Haddal 2009). Indeed, in 2006, the Secure Fence Act mandated the "construction of more than 700 miles of double-reinforced fence to be built along the border with Mexico," as well as the installation of updated equipment and an increase in border checkpoints (Migration Policy Institute 2013). The Trump administration has simply *continued* to implement the Act, building on what came before, adding a wall made of imposing steel bollards and improved infrastructure: lighting, cameras, sensors, and roads.

Neither are the Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies unprecedented; the United States has a long history of implementing harsh anti-immigrant laws and policies driven by racial animus: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 or Operation Wetback of 1954 (Dechaine 47). Indeed, for years, politicians on both sides of the aisle have pursued and enacted legislation fueled by racist and nativist sentiments.

In effect, Trump's border wall and the immigration policies surrounding it are the product of the legislation of previous administrations, especially Bill Clinton's Democratic administration. Trump's border wall replaces the one mandated by one of Clinton's signature pieces of legislation: The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act [I.I.R.I.R.A] (Gessen). According to the Center for Migration Studies, this law, signed into effect in 1996, laid out the infrastructure for much of the Trump administration's immigration policies. The act "eliminat[ed] due process from the overwhelming majority of removal cases…[implemented] technical roadblocks to asylum…"created new immigration-related crimes …[established] the concept of 'criminal alienhood[which] slowly, but purposefully" conflate a lack of immigration status with criminality (Abrego et al. 695). It also "mandated the construction of a physical barrier on parts of the southern border, laying the literal foundation for Trump's wall" (Gessen).

Nonetheless, Trump's policies are qualitatively different from those of his predecessors. First, unlike his recent predecessors, Trump has explicitly incited anti-immigration sentiments in his base by casting Mexicans as rap-

ists, murderers, and drug dealers (Scott), and African, Haitian, and El Salvadorian immigrants as people coming from "shithole" countries (Kendi 2020). Second, the Trump administration has exploited existing laws and procedures in ways that were never intended. According to Aaron Reichlin-Melnick of the American Immigration Council, "much of what the Trump Administration has done has been to find the hidden weapons in existing immigration law and then use them to the full extent," taking policies implemented through laws such as I.I.R.I.R.A and using them in ways they had never been used before (Chotiner 2020).

Given these distinguishing characteristics of the Trump Administration's approach, the Kafkaesque quality of the immigrant experience begins to come into focus. Trump's immigration rhetoric emphasizes certain stereotypes and deploys damaging metaphors: people coming in from the Southern border as "invaders" or "animals" (Scott); Haitian immigrants as AIDS-infested primitives who should "go back to their huts" (Kendi); DACA-recipients as hardened criminals. To his base, this rhetoric signals the "threat" immigrants pose, even as it grossly misrepresents the immigrants it maligns.

This is because metaphors are arguments in themselves. Metaphors are vessels through which a person can communicate a message without needing to present it through a detailed and informed argument, because by saying that A is like B, a person can characterize B without going into the details of what makes B, B. In other words, metaphors make arguments about things without bearing the burden of proof (Williams viii).

Even if the President's constructed image of immigrants is false, it is bolstered in the minds of Trump's followers by the immigrant's clear juxtaposition to the Law, to the order of the imagined political community. The popularity of the "Build the Wall" slogan is clear evidence that Trump has won the "argument" about the nature of immigrants. The truth of their representation is as inconsequential as the Greatness and Sovereignty of America and Americans is unquestionable.

Indeed, Trump's "America First" rhetoric manifests in his administration's bureaucratic cruelty towards the most vulnerable immigrants. *The Washington Post* reports that at a summit on human trafficking on January 2020, the Trump administration called for the protection of trafficking victims, all the while "subject[ing] them to a minefield of new monetary, bureaucratic and legal risks, up to and including deportation" (*Washington Post* Editorial Board). A variety of procedural changes have led to a reduction of people applying for "T-visas," permits for victims of human trafficking that

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[6] See Donald Trump's tweet: "Many of the people in DACA, no longer very young, are far from "angels." Some are very tough, hardened criminals. President Obama said he had no legal right to sign order, but would anyway. If Supreme Court remedies with overturn, a deal will be made with Dems for them to stay!" Made on 12 November 2019, 5:45 AM

allow them to work and remain in the United States. Unsuccessful applicants for T-visas now face deportation and a perilous return to their prior circumstance, which has brought a 25% drop in applications.

Other policy changes include demanding more evidence from T-visa applicants; this from individuals who, for the most part, cannot meet such requirements. In addition, T-visa application fees, which most trafficking victims cannot afford, are no longer being waived. As the *Washington Post* Editorial Board poignantly observes, "the shift in fortunes for trafficking victims effected under Mr. Trump amounts to death by a thousand bureaucratic cuts".

The Trump administration has also implemented a new processing policy for more general visa categories, allowing petitions to be swiftly and indiscriminately rejected. If a person applying for a visa leaves any fields blank in his or her form, the application is automatically rejected: "for example, if 'Apt. Number' is left blank because the immigrant lives in a house: rejected. Or if the field for a middle name is left blank because no middle name exists: rejected, too" (Rampell 2020). Immigrants for the most part have *no knowledge* of this new rule: it appeared unannounced on the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website.

Such obfuscation is fundamental to the plight of K. as he awaits legitimation by the Castle. Like the Castle, the Trump administration uses obscure complexities embedded within opaque bureaucracy to refuse or to forestall providing protection to those it capriciously deems unworthy. Immigrants, like the man before the Law, the imperial messenger, and K., are kept from the Law, the internalized order of the political community, because of a deeply rooted desire to preserve the "purity" of the nation's character. Trump's populist rhetoric has re-invigorated those who, because of America's growing diversity, cling zealously to the notion that a "pure" America once existed. This resurgence and the administration's bureaucracy combine to turn the immigrant's experience into a Kafkaesque nightmare: an exclusionary utopian vision, materially enacted, has produced dystopian consequences for immigrants. This is felt not only by those desperate for access at the Southern Border, but also the immigrant community within the United States, those awaiting to have legitimacy conferred upon them.

Kafka's novel lays bare the effect of an inscrutable bureaucracy that presents its decrees as divine, its power unquestionable, irresistible, unknowable. President Trump's immigration bureaucracy also wields byzantine inscrutability to similar catastrophic effect on immigrants. In that way, it is Kafkaesque. But the transparency of its ideology (chanted at rallies, tweeted at followers) means its decrees do not have the force of the divine, nor that its power is ultimately unknowable and insurmountable.

But America must be true to its Law…

**Conclusion**

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals [DACA] program protects about 700, 000 immigrants known as Dreamers – the children of undocumented immigrants in America and of America through no choice of their own. Through DACA many have been able to buy homes, start families, go to college, get driver's licenses (Gonzales et al. 2019) (Liptak and Shear). They could do all of this without fearing that at any moment they could be uprooted from the only place they have known as home, distanced from their friends and families and from the lives they made for themselves. This all changed in 2017 when Donald Trump signed an executive order that fulfilled a campaign promises to end DACA (Romo et al. 2017).

On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that President Trump and his administration did not meet the procedural requirements for ending DACA. The Supreme Court's ruling, calling the administration's justification for ending DACA "arbitrary and capricious," offered some relief to Dreamers. But it did not, as many of them have expressed, rid them entirely of the anxiety and the distress that Trump's rhetoric and his administration's policies have created for them. The day after the ruling, President Trump made clear that he would renew his effort to end the program, and since the Court left open the possibility that the Trump administration could come back and offer better policy reasons for doing so, the uncertainty and anxiety continues to consume Dreamers (Galvan and Riechmann 2020). As one Dreamer puts it, "I'm happy, but very cautiously happy" (Galvan 2020).

The immigrant community lived in state of fear and uncertainty before President Trump's administration and its explicit desire to deprive them of their lives here in the United States. Previous administrations created the bureaucracy, and justified its opaqueness by appealing to egalitarian principles, as though the impersonality of the process guaranteed its neutrality, and everyone, regardless of origins, were treated equally. Even before the Trump administration, that opaqueness was distressing to many immigrants, waiting, with no recourse, for judgement to be passed. That opaqueness, however, has become more distressing under Trump's presidency, because now the bureaucracy is clearly and actively working against them.

The readiness of the immigration bureaucracy to fall into lockstep with President Trump's naked racism and xenophobia should clarify for Americans what many immigrants have sensed all along. American immigration policy does not protect nor maintain America's Law (as set down in the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence). It falls devastatingly short. Immi-

grants, as is evident, are powerless to change the system. Only citizens can, and must, make America better.

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# Oceans or Mountains Between: Russia, Siberia, and the Question of Eurasianism

By Rebecca Hentges

The traditional narrative of sixteenth and seventeenth century global empires includes Western European nations such as Britain, Spain, and France, but excludes Russia even though she was an active participant in imperial domination. While Western European empires had oceans physically separating them from their colonies, Russia expanded into the adjacent territory of Siberia, a vast land to the east from which she was separated by the Ural Mountains. Easily surmountable, the Urals served as more of a figurative than literal barrier between the political center and the colony. Without Russia having to cross oceans to get to Siberia, it was generally not considered a colony in the same way that British America or India were.

However, by drawing on the imperial practices of Western Europe, Russian strategies in Siberia developed a distinctly colonial approach and the Siberian experience became decidedly colonial in nature. This is important given Eurasianist claims since the early nineteenth century that Russia uniquely inhabits both Europe and Asia in a substantial way (Laruelle 2-3). While geographically Russia and her territories clearly spans the divide between East and West, Russia's treatment of Siberia as a colony demanded the emphasis rather than collapse of cultural and ideological differences between their peoples. The physical surmountability of the Ural Mountains is at odds with their ideological and cultural significance, representing, as I will show, irreconcilable distinctions between Russia's Europeanness and her purported Asianness.

A note: the Russian incursion into Siberia was a multi-generational, incremental undertaking. This article seeks to capture the geopolitical scope of the narrative: it tells the story of Russia and Siberia, East and West, Europe and Asia, rather than getting caught up minute detail. This article therefore

favors the broad strokes of history over specificity. So, for example, it refers to the "Grand Prince of Muscovy" or "Tsar" to invoke the general concept of a head of state, rather referencing particular Grand Princes and Tsars (unless otherwise specified).

In addition, this article does not use the term "Eurasianist" and "Eurasianism," to reference any *particular* historical iteration of Eurasianist arguments. The terms are not used to refer to, for example, 19th century defenders of Russia's empire, or early 20th century Bolshevik scholars, or post-Soviet neo-Eurasianists. Rather, the terms speak broadly to those who claim Russian exceptionalism based on her territorial, geopolitical, and/or cultural European and Asian hybridity.

## I

To understand Russia's relationship with Siberia and colonialism, it is essential to understand the geopolitical development of the Russian state, the predecessor to which was the Grand Dutchy of Moscow, a vasal state of the Mongol Empire from the late-13th to late-15th centuries. As the Grand Prince of Muscovy (the leader of the Grand Dutchy of Moscow plotted to gain full political independence from the Golden Horde, he consolidated power and established dominance over the now-fractured leadership of Kievan Rus (Bushkovitch 24) – a former monarchy to the north west that united East Slavic and Finnic peoples and territories.

In a further development, the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 changed the religious authority presiding over the Grand Prince of Muscovy. The ascendancy of Islam in Constantinople meant that it could no longer serve as the center of the Orthodox Church. This provided an opportunity for the Grand Prince to consolidate power not only in political but also religious terms (Arnold xiii). For the first time, The Russian Orthodox Church elected their own Orthodox official without the consent of Constantinople, thereby claiming religious independence.

In 1480, Russia gained independence from The Golden Horde, having merged as a state, rather than a loose federation of historically and ethnically related principalities in 1478 (Bushkovitch 37). If, initially, religious independence was a necessary response to the fall of the Byzantines, the autocephaly of The Russian Orthodox Church now laid the foundations for the new Russian state's claim to exceptionalism. Russia could cast itself as the rightful inheritor of true Christianity, the "Third Rome" (Bushkovitch 36), thereby fomenting its Great Power status and imperial ambitions among the European Powers.

The history of her occupation by the Mongols greatly influenced Russia's imperial ambitions. In fact, the early Russian Empire expanded into the power vacuum created by the dissolution of the Mongol Empire. Later, Eurasianists would argue that the Mongols had served a positive function for the Russians by uniting Eurasian lands for later rule by the Russian Tsar (Glebov 63-64).

While the 'uniting Eurasian lands' theory implied that Russia was destined (or perhaps, as "The Third Rome," divinely preordained) to rule over the previously Mongol lands, other scholars note a less deterministic, but nevertheless lasting impact the Mongol occupation had on Russian Imperial strategies. The manner of Mongol rule greatly influenced the strategies used by Russian Tsars to govern the vast territory of the Eurasian steppes. Russian political organization closely resemble that of the Mongol rulers (Ostrowski, 39). Under the Mongol Khan, the Grand Prince of Muscovy was integrated into the political organization of the Mongols and was required to function within it. The Grand Prince, in turn, learned from the systems employed by the Mongols which, through him, influenced the hierarchy of political systems in Muscovy and the future Russian Empire.

Those same governing systems were implemented throughout Siberia in Russia's initial occupation. The borders between the center of empire and its territories were porous, facilitating a constant exchange between Moscow and Siberia, and each region was ruled by local officials arranged in a complex and overlapping hierarchy (Gerasimov et al. 8). However, it would be wrong to claim that the early Russian Empire developed purely through Mongol influence. Even in the early Russian Empire, commonalities between Russian Imperialism and Western European Imperialism started to take shape ("Russian Rule in Turkestan" 673).

Despite these commonalities (which will be addressed in more detail soon), one notable difference between Russia and Western Europe would permanently alter the way the Russian Empire was perceived by the rest of the world. Russia's Great Power status would be questioned, and she would be excluded from the ranks of Western European empires based on her inability to pursue empire via naval conquest. When the European age of empire began in 1492, the Russian state was less than two decades old. She was primarily focused on establishing a central political authority and defending her borderlands. In addition, the emerging Russian state did not have the necessary naval experience to circumnavigate the globe with the other Western European powers. Western Europe domination of the globe was virtually complete by the time Russian naval power could begin to rival it. Furthermore, Russia's geographical position was never ideal for a sea-based empire.

Western European scholars have frequently suggested that maritime capabilities are a useful determinant of a nation's potential for global imperial glory (Andrade 173). However, this argument serves Western European claims to exceptionalism. It should be and has been criticized for conflation of maritime capacities with technological and cultural modernity. The implication is that land-based expansionism (practiced, for example, by the Mongols) are premodern, and less-developed. (Gerasimov et al. 7-8). Russia's colonial "achievements" were therefore dismissed by Western Europeans powers as less developed.

The Russian case, in fact, challenges the conflation of maritime capacity and "developed" imperialism. While naval ability obviously provided the necessary building blocks for an overseas empire, it does not follow that all overseas empires were more developed. Similarly, it does not follow that land-based empires were less developed than overseas empires. In many ways, despite the differences in the barriers that separated their centers and peripheries, the colonial experience in Russian Siberia did not differ dramatically from the colonial experience in British America.

Nevertheless, the Russian Empire would be excluded from the triumphalist story of Western European powers' progression from small, land-based nations to large, transcontinental empires. The scale and power that the Russian Empire would later achieve suggests the limitations of the view that naval ability alone only distinguishes the modernity and expansionist potential of a nascent empire. Russia, as shall be shown, was able to compete with her Western European neighbors in the colonial age without having to go overseas.

## II

By the late seventeenth century, Russia had expanded way beyond the borders of Muscovy, the small politically autonomous principality West of the Urals. In 1603, the Romanov dynasty assumed leadership, establishing a stable ruling class that would retain leadership until the twentieth century. By 1672, Russia had expanded its territory all the way to the Pacific Coast. In comparison, the establishment of the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 seems like a miniscule territorial gain (Arnold xiv). However, while the colony of Jamestown would later become pivotal in triumphalist Western European accounts of their colonial successes, Eurasianists would refused such narratives altogether, suggesting that the immense landmass Russia had gained during the same period was not an act of expansionist incursion, but an inevitable reflection of her inherent identity. The Eurasianist narrative obscures the colonial nature of Russian expansion.

Like her Western European neighbors in the early years of colonial expansion, Russia's internal politics were dominated by the concerns of governing a diverse population, extracting resources, participating in industrialization, and developing her national identity in light of new Enlightenment political philosophies. As a direct result of this close relationship with Europe, Russia was subject to the same ideologies that justified imperialism. While her early policies governing Siberia were arguably Asian in origin, they would soon resemble models of colonial governance by Spanish, British, and French officials in the New World.

These Western European models were designed by imperial centers governing distant, foreign colonies. Rather than adjust the governing models to fit her geographical proximity to her territories, however, Russia "reconfigured" her proximity to her territories to fit the governing models. She established a cultural and ideological *wall* between herself and her adjacent colony. Unlike the porous boundaries of the Mongol imperial model, controlled, as they were by a clear political hierarchy, the Western European model hinged on a clear and rigid distinction between the center of power and the colony, the latter's sole purpose being to provide the resources and land by which to bolster the influence of the former.

In time, the builders of Russian Empire would begin to view their imperial ambitions in the light of Western European expansionism. However, to justify the uniqueness of Russian imperial ambitions, a new sect of Russian thought emerged: "Asianism," which argued that Russia was the only developed, modern, world power able to lead Asia (writ large) because of her historical relationship with the steppe peoples. The argument allowed Russians at all levels of governance to justify her imperial ambitions in Siberia as morally superior to that of Western European empires ("Russian Rule in Turkestan" 677). However, the fact that Asianism was deployed as a justification of Russia's exceptional right to empire in and of itself puts Russia within the Western European colonial tradition. Such justifications based on spurious comparisons were one of the definitive characteristics of post-Enlightenment imperialism (Gerasimov et al. 45).

Russia's justification of expansion into Siberia, was only *ostensibly* different to that of Western European powers. While the Mongols justified their right to conquest in terms of divine authority, this explanation was no longer sufficient for post-Enlightenment European expansion (Michal 347). Post-Enlightenment expansion was justified as the civilizing responsibility of Westerners, to be carried out in "less civilized" areas of the world. Rather than justify their right to empire in terms of a mandate from heaven, these colonizers justified their empire via the assertion that the land and peoples exist-

ing outside of civilized European culture "needed to be transformed through the establishment of permanent, organized populations; the development of commercial and economic activity; the provision of good government; and the guarantee of the fundamental rights of the individuals living there" (Keene 69-70). This civilizing mission was primarily an abstract justification for imperial expansion. In practice, the civilizing of "less civilized cultures" mostly involved destroying the native population and establishing European settlers in the newly barren lands.

Eurasianists who argued that Russia did not belong amongst the classification of Western European imperial dominators point to the differences in Russia's governance of its territories' uniquely diverse populations. They argue that in comparison to imperial powers in Western Europe, Russia did not appeal to the rhetoric of civilizing native populations as a pretense for brutalizing them. They highlight Western European concepts of biological superiority over other races as justification of a right to empire that did not seem prevalent in Russia. They point to the fact that "Russian imperialism was distinctively tolerant and assimilationist when contrasted with the imperialism of the other European powers" ("Imperial Citizenship" 327). This assimilationist tendency would seem to be an inheritance from Mongol rule, which used it to extract tribute from the native populations.

However, these arguments conflict with the civilizing, virgin lands rhetoric employed throughout the Russian imperial conquest of Siberia. In a seeming contradiction, Russian imperial strategy deployed the European model of settling "virgin lands" to the East, *as well a*s the Mongol strategy of assimilating conquered people into empire to collect tributes from their regions. This dual strategy resulted in diverse experiences of empire for natives of Siberia depending on era, the level of political authority present where they were, as well as the whims and ambitions of specific individuals. While early Russian imperialism may have involved the (arguably) peaceful assimilation of diverse ethnic groups, this trend would disappear as Russia's perspective on empire began to fall in line with the Western European model.

At first the Russian strategy for dealing with native populations encouraged assimilation via baptism and forbade slavery. These policies eventually became less beneficial and practical to the expansion of empire. As such, they changed to reflect clear, hierarchical differentiations between Russia's central subjects and its empire's colonial subjects (Lantzeff 101-104). The encouragement of new settlers in Siberia aligned Russia's strategies and ideologies with those of Western European colonialism. Russian imperialism supported both individually driven and state sponsored encroachment into Siberian lands by whatever means necessary to ensure the collection of furs and taxes for the tsar (Gerasimov et al. 129-130).

Eurasianist scholars who argue the moral superiority of Russia's Siberian strategy emphasize the idea that Siberia was occupied by private and corporate concerns, rather than the Russian state. They point to "independent" bands of Cossacks who crossed the Urals and settled in Siberia to make their livelihood. However, these accounts ignore the fact that, like the New World explorers, the Cossacks were encouraged by the Tsar's promise of riches. Their incursion was state sanctioned and sponsored. From the Tsar's perspective, encouraging them to settle in Siberia was a way to ensure the collection of tributes – similar to the Mongol style. From the perspective of the settlers, the "unclaimed" lands were means to the ends of independent wealth and personal gains (Gerasimov et al. 130).

The Eurasianist claim that Russia is a "bridge between East and West" was only really convincing to intellectual defenders and apologists for the Russian imperialism in Asia. To those on the other side of the Urals, whether they had crossed over to conquer, or had lived there all along, Russia was indisputably a European power coming to colonize the East ("Russian Rule in Turkestan" 706). In fact, even prominent Asianists recognized the reality of the Russian Imperial situation. In "What is Asia to Us?", for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky recognized that Russia from the perspective of the West was Eastern and from the perspective of the East was Western. So, while Russia was excluded from the ranks of imperial power by Western Europe, for the Asian peoples experiencing colonization, Russia was undoubtedly in lockstep with Western European Imperialism. Furthermore, those actively participating in the colonization understood that their responsibility was to spread Western civilization in Asia ("Russian Rule in Turkestan" 707). The colonized, colonizer, and good faith intellectuals agreed: in Asia, Russia was a Western power. From this analysis, it is difficult to understand how the narrative of unique, humane, exceptional Russian expansionism emerged as distinct from colonization by Western European powers.

## III

While analyzing the rhetoric of intellectuals and citizens at the center of the empire can enhance understanding of the ways the colony was administered, it cannot give a clear depiction of life within that colony. To fully understand the relationship between Moscow as the center of the empire and colonial administration within Siberia, it is necessary to look at the practical administration of the empire. Considering the perspectives of administrators, settlers, and natives in Siberia it becomes evident that, in practice, Siberia was clearly a colony of the Russian Empire.

In Imperial Russia, a complex system of "prikazes", or territorial offices, administered various aspects of empire. While the initial establishment of

prikazes was an accidental byproduct of the Russian state's consolidation of power over it growing landmass, by 1497 prikazes were the official governing system utilized by Moscow (Lantzeff 1-3). Prior to 1637, the administration of Siberia fell under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office Prikaz, and administrative responsibilities were distributed between various territorial prikazes depending on an area's current administrative needs or the desires of governing officials. In 1637, the Siberian Prikaz was established as an independent prikaz in charge of its own administration, although for a few years after, it remained largely in lockstep with the Foreign Office Prikaz (Lantzeff 5). While Peter the Great (who reigned from 1682 to 1725) would attempt to close the Siberian Prikaz as part of an overall effort to reorganize Russian administrative affairs, it proved too distinct and complicated to be easily abolished. It would remain an independent administrative structure until 1763 (Lantzeff 6).

Historian George. B. Lantzeff highlights the distinctiveness of the Siberian Prizak in *Siberia in the Seventeenth Century: A Study of the Colonial Administration.* He notes that the Siberian Prizak was uniquely occupied with information gathering in an effort to come to terms with the scale, scope, ethnic and political diversity, as well as the earning potential of Moscow's territorial acquisition. It was allowed privileges that other prikazes did not share: "while other prikazes carried out policies of centralization and uniformity in the territories under their jurisdiction, the Siberian Prikaz allowed the Siberian administration to develop characteristics of its own" (11-13). Siberia may have been overseen by an *independently* minded proxy of the central government in Moscow, but a proxy nonetheless.

The hands-on administration of Siberia was carried out by a patchwork of local authorities made up of ambitious individuals, business leaders, and colonial officials sent to the colony to control the production of resources for the central empire (Edward 62). The extreme autonomy granted these representatives distinguishes Russian Imperial strategy from that of the Mongols, whose representatives were subject to a clear hierarchy of authority and were expected to report back to the central empire in an established manner. In addition, rather than merely collecting the tributes offered by local populations, Moscow's representatives were also charged with establishing infrastructure and extracting resources.

This relationship of exchange between a colonial center and periphery was more reminiscent of Western European imperial practices than those of the Mongol Empire (Gerasimov et al. 128). The Mongol Empire assumed the self-sufficiency of their conquests. They had little interest in establishing substantial non-native populations in its territories to assert their control.

Tributes, which certainly enriched the Mongol Empire, also served to prove its dominion and the subservience of conquered people and lands. Russia and other Western European empires placed an emphasis on relocating officials, specialists, and peasant workers from the center to the colonies (Gerasimov et al. 128). Colonies were thus "settled" in order to increase their productivity and encourage their self-sufficiency. In Russia's case, merchants, farmers, adventurers, prospectors, and colonial officials headed to Siberia encouraged by the government and in pursuit of personal gain. This somewhat haphazard pattern of individualized relocation closely resembles that of the British, French, and Spanish settlements in the New World (Lantzeff v).

The government's encouragement took the form of land grants with few obligations and expectations (Keene 63). Tsar Michael I's dispatches to leaders of Siberian conquests emphasize the importance of calling for volunteers to move into newly conquered areas. These dispatches include instructions about providing the settlers with whatever resources they need to make the journey (Verdnasky 262-265). Imperial officials were ordered to survey farmed land to establish whether peasants had sufficient resources to fulfil production potential in service of the Siberian territory and the Tsar. While the ultimate aim was "to increase the sovereign's revenue without overburdening the peasants," the self-sufficiency of the Siberian colonies were also at stake: the "plow land should grow sufficient grain to provide the service men of Kuznetsk and other Siberian towns...with their yearly compensation in grain" (Verdnasky 264). This obsession with encouraging settlement of and extraction of resources from conquered territories bears the mark of Western European colonization rather than Mongol conquest.

Clearly, the Tsar's ambitions for Siberia extended beyond what the native populations had to offer by way of tribute. The Russian Empire still utilized the collection of tribute from native populations, however, the Tsar Michael I's dispatches encourage the imperial officials "to grant [the Siberians] all possible exemptions" (Verdnasky 263). The Tsar's native strategy does bear some resemblance to the hands-off approach of Mongolian conquest. He was not interested in changing the political or religious practices of the native populations. Russian conquerors were instructed not to interfere with the native tribal structure (Lantzeff 99). Russian Officials worked hard to utilize existing native hierarchies, gaining the favor of influential natives in order to legitimize the motherland's rule (91).

As Russian rule over Siberia evolved, natives maintained their own law code and were subject to the punishments they prescribed, while the Russian settlers were subject to Russian laws (100). This differentiated law structure allowed the native Siberians to establish their laws officially with the Russian

Empire. However, it discouraged integration between the native population and the Russian settlers, and so emphasized the distinction between colonizer and colonized.

Native Siberians did, however, have recourse to join the ranks of their conquerors. They remained subject to the native legal code unless they willingly converted to Christianity. A baptized native was freed from the requirements for natives and subjected to new expectations as a Russian (101). This assimilation strategy points to the larger Russian attitude regarding native acceptance of Russian rule in Siberia. Instructions were given to the leaders in Siberia to give speeches "emphasizing the power and benevolence of the [Russian] government, enumerating the injustices from which the natives suffered, and promising, in the future, new favors and the elimination of evil practices" (93). These appeals to justice and fair treatment under the Russians suggest the Empire's courting of natives as part of a larger aim: The Tsar desired them to become willing subjects and not just tribute paying natives of conquered lands.

The Tsar's overtures, and the native's assimilationist path to Russian citizenship, should not be understood as indicative of Russia's "Eurasian" identity. Rather, they suggest a clear awareness on the part of colonial administration and the Tsar, of the cultural differences and incongruities between its European center and Asian periphery.

## IIII

My review of Russian imperial policy and the colonial experience of Siberians is not intended to take a moralistic stance on the 'right' of Russia in the past or present to involve herself in Siberian politics. Rather, I hope to highlight the existence of a wall between European Russia and Asian Siberia. This wall may not have been intentional. Arguably, it was an accidental outcome of various and seemingly haphazard imperial strategies employed at different times by a diverse cast of Russian imperial officials. Taken together, however, these strategies and policies perpetuate, sustain, and respond to a cultural wall that undermines the claim that Russian identity is marked by its simultaneous Europeanness and Asianness.

I make no argument in defense of imperialism. I do not that Russia ought to have continued with a Mongol style imperial model nor that she was right to adopt Western European imperial strategies. Rather, I seek to understand the influence of Mongolian and Western Europe imperial practices in the development of the Russian Empire and the ideology of Eurasianism by which Soviet and Russian intellectuals justified it.

It should be added that "Europeanness" and "Asian-ness" are overly broad assignations and I do not mean to seem reductionist: my analysis does not mean to imply that the Mongol Empire was the only land-based empire within Asia, that it representative of all Asian empires, or even that distinct Asian and European styles of empire exist. Rather, I follow in the shadow of Asianists and Eurasianists who argue that the Mongol influence in Russia played an important role in the development of Russia as a geographically and culturally Eurasian empire. Finally, I do not aim to comment modern-day Siberia. Instead, I only hope to explain how the relationship between Moscow and Siberia developed in the way that it did.

In summation, then, the early Russian state was primarily influenced by the experience of Mongol domination as well as newfound religious independence and authority. Together, these experiences would shape the initial Russian domination of Siberia. Following the history of Mongol rule, initial Russian governance of Siberia adopted the structures of Mongol conquest in which the boundaries between center and periphery were porous, and subject to clear hierarchies. However, these clear hierarchy would be complicated by ideas about empire coming to Russia from Western Europe. The Western European version of empire relied heavily on concepts of place and boundaries in their conception of political power. In this version, the separation of the colonial center from the colony, traditionally by sea, was essential to the differentiated subjecthood and exploitation of its conquests. Eurasianists and Asianists, who appeal to an "inherent" Asian aspect of Russian identity do so as a part of their moral and historical argument for Russia's right to empire. For them, the Urals are an easily surmountable topographical feature. They misrepresent the extent to which Russian imperial practices reconfigured the Urals into an uncrossable figurative divide that separated European Moscow from Asian Siberia.

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# Panels, Frames, and Gutters: Empathy, Comics Journalism, and Joe Sacco's *Footnotes from Gaza*

By Cristobella Durrette

Art Spiegelman's genre-bending graphic novel Maus won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 and brought greater attention for comics as an autobiographical medium. Maus interweaves contemporary interactions between "Artie" and his father, Vladek Spiegelman with an account of the Holocaust atrocities Vladek a Polish Jew, suffered. Through an anthropomorphic filter, Spiegelman portrays Nazi soldiers as cats and Jewish people as mice. He thus draws on the "cultural association and attested behavioral patterns" of animals to suggest a predator-prey dynamic and call attention to "the human institutions, practices, and experiences that are his core concerns" (Herman 169). In representing human individuals (personally significant to the artist) through non-human creatures, Maus simultaneously encourages readers to identify with characters and to critically engage human conflict (Herman 169). Spiegelman thus demonstrates the capacity of comics to evoke and interrogate historical turmoil and its contemporary legacies.

In subsequent decades, the comics industry experienced a renaissance in its coverage of current and historical conflict. Comics creators found that narratives regarding complex political affairs, the investigation of sensitive issues – including but not limited to accounts of violence – could successfully be conveyed through the comics form (Nelson). Such nonfiction comics displayed elements of what Tom Wolfe describes as New Journalism, employing literary devices traditionally used in novels and short stories to convey accounts of actual events (15).

A number of these nonfiction narratives document the experiences of people living and working in the Middle East. The appearance of Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis, Didier LeFèvre's The Photographer: Into War-torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders, and Joe Sacco's Palestine and Footnotes

in Gaza in the 1990s and early 2000s constitute attempts to bring the reality of Middle Eastern experience to the forefront of public consciousness in the West. The Palestinian reality Sacco conveys in his landmark works reveal offer perspectives of a region and people often misrepresented in the Western mainstream media. Such misrepresentations provide "little opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian cause" (Bartley 66). Sacco characterizes his comics set in Palestine and the Gaza Strip "as a response to biased representations of Palestinians within the United States" (66).

In contrast to other nonfiction comics, Sacco's work transcends graphic memoir and travelogue to create multilayered journalistic, historical pieces that meld instances of everyday life with accounts of history. Sacco employs journalistic conventions within the framework of sequential art. The graphic narratives in Sacco's comics journalism intervene "against a culture of invisibility by taking the risk of" representing events relegated to the dusty corners of history (Chute et al 771)). It is this dynamic that this article seeks to explore: how the comics medium is suited to intervene against historical erasure through its invocation of empathetic responses from readers. Sacco's 2009 graphic novel Footnotes in Gaza is especially suited to such a study. Footnotes investigates mid-1990sconditions in the Gaza Strip against the backdrop of widely unremembered violence in its southern region a half-century prior. Sacco characterizes these events, two instances of Palestinian slaughter by Israeli forces in the towns of Khan Younis and Rafah in November 1956, as "footnotes to a sideshow of a forgotten war," (Footnotes 8). Sacco inserts himself into the narrative as a character, an investigative journalist. He thereby invites readers to identify with him as he takes in the region's painful history. What comics writer and theorist Scott McCloud refers to as the "sensually stimulating world" (43) of the comics page becomes the site of Sacco's and, through their identification with him, the reader's exploration of the Gaza Strip's violent past in its complex present. This article will examine how Sacco builds his "sensually stimulating world" through the visual and verbal techniques of the comics medium, and how he invites reader participation and empathy.

## Objectivity and Reader Participation

In Footnotes in Gaza Sacco enables reader participation by complicating a primary tenet of journalistic practice: objectivity. The concept of ob-

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[1] These definitions are key to the discussion of sequential graphic art:
Panel – a single contained illustration in a comic.
Gutter – the divisions / blank spaces between individual frames

jectivity mandates that journalists practice a consistent method of evidence gathering, a "transparent approach," to ensure that their "personal and cultural biases" do not interfere with a story's accuracy (American Press Institute). Journalistic objectivity necessitates that the knowledge presented in a work must show no sign of the knower (Daston 17), resulting in the erasure of the writer's story from the narrative they are telling. Emerging prominently at the beginning of the nineteenth century, journalistic objectivity promised "a pure reflection of the world as it is," through "focus-on-facts empiricism" that emphasized neutrality and non-partisanship (Boudana 386).

Aspects of this facts-focused form of journalism remain in practice today: the corporate dissemination of "facts" or "content" without conscience. At the beginning of Footnotes in Gaza, Sacco touches on this phenomenon, suggesting that his fellow journalists working in the Gaza region could refile stories from a month or even a year prior without anyone noticing (4-5). That it is possible to recycle previously submitted stories suggests the disjointed relationship between facts-centric "objective" reporting and the lived experience of those it claims to cover and the journalists who encounter them. Indeed, corporate news organization editorial policies mostly prohibit journalists from "becoming the news": they are not allowed to personally engage in activism or openly take a stand on public issues. While Sacco does not voice his opinion on the past and present conflict in the Gaza Strip, he breaks from the historical perception of journalistic objectivity by situating himself within the story.

This gesture, as well as the perceived subjectivity of curated, hand-drawn, sequential representations of events, raises questions about the objectivity of Sacco's text. The stakes are high because the accurate portrayal of Palestinian life in Gaza has become increasingly important in recent years. Living conditions have worsened in the face of inadequate basic services to accommodate a growing population. Months before Footnotes in Gaza's release, Israeli forces "launched a major military campaign" on Gaza towns (Zanotti et al 2). Compounded with Israel's continued control over the movement of goods and people across Gaza's borders, this clash sparked concern in the United States and other international communities regarding responsibility and reconstruction (Zanotti et al 2). Three years after Footnotes in Gaza hit shelves, the United Nations published a report explaining that without infrastructural improvement, the Gaza Strip would be unlivable by 2020, when the available resources would no longer sustain the burgeoning population (United Nations Country Team). As predicted, the population in Gaza has now increased to over two million people. Essential services have yet to catch up: unemployment is creeping toward fifty percent; food insecurity impacts

two-thirds of all households; and 97 percent of water in Gaza's aquifer is undrinkable (O'Toole).

Sacco's awareness of his responsibility is evident in the introduction to his 2012 anthology, Journalism, in which he explores writer and cartoonist responsibility in comics creation. He argues that the illustrative possibilities of the comics medium provide opportunity for interpretation but does not free journalists from an obligation "to report accurately, to get quotes right, and to check claims" (1). Rather than freeing creators from responsibility, comics journalism demands an additional level of consideration. The artist's personal style must be balanced with accurate portrayal in order to convey the reality of a person, place, thing, or idea. Sacco argues that "anything that can be drawn accurately should be drawn accurately," even if the writer is not a firsthand witness to the events that they are recounting (1). Absence from a particular event – for example, a historical event such as the violence in Khan Younis and Rafah in November 1956 – necessitates what Sacco refers to as the "informed imagination" (2). Accordingly, eyewitness testimony is gathered – with an emphasis on visual information evokes time, place, and situation – which is then "translated" into sequential art that represents the experience of the eyewitnesses and orients the reader in a particular moment (2).

By including himself as a character in Footnotes, Sacco invites readers to participate in the practice of "informed imagination". As an investigative journalist he establishes himself as an outsider and an outside observer (Fall 98), a position not unlike that of the reader. On the one hand, this allows him to be transparent about his approach to evidence gathering (a central tenet of journalistic objectivity). On the other hand, Sacco introduces readers to the people whose words and faces he "translates" into informed but imagined graphic representations. Like Sacco, then, readers are outsiders looking in, trying to understand both the evidence and its translation. They are drawn into an empathetic encounter.

Sacco also draws attention to the limits of his own imagination, a gesture that (unlike purely objective practices) respectfully defers to individual witness's experience rather than its translation into journalistic "truth". For example, one of Sacco's interviewees, Faris Barbukh, was fourteen at the time of the November 1956 massacre in Khan Younis. He takes Sacco and his guide Abed to a now-car-lined wall that, in 1956, was lined with corpses of more than a hundred Palestinians. Sacco is clearly aware that, for Barbukh, the wall is a dissonant site, peaceful in the present but evocative of impossible past horror. Barbukh lives in that dissonance, experiencing the present and past at the site of the wall. But Sacco cannot "translate" the complex, fragmentary, ways in which Barbukh's past and present collide at the wall into his sequen-

tial graphic vocabulary. He resorts to panels that flash between the body-lined wall of Barbukh's memories and the wall at which he stares in the present-day (Sacco Footnotes 96-102).

Fig 1. Barbukh stares at the wall in the present and in the past (Sacco Footnotes100)

Not having to cohere the dissonance himself, Sacco is an outsider who lacks the point of reference needed to understand how Barbukh holds such dissonant experiences simultaneously (Fall 98). Sacco's restless movement back and forth mirrors that of the reader's "bafflement and unease" (Fall 99).

In summary, by revealing his methods as an investigative journalist through his own inclusion as a character in Footnotes, Sacco sustains a central tenet of objectivity: transparency about evidence gathering. In drawing readers into the evidence gathering process, he humanizes the sources of his information. In evoking the difficulties for outsiders of "translating" eyewitness accounts into a consumable narrative "version" of events, Sacco upholds the final authority of eyewitnesses over objectivist claims to "truth." Readers, too, are outsiders, and Sacco invites them to project themselves onto him, to think beyond "fact" and to empathize with the people they encounter.

## New Comics Journalism

Sacco employs literary elements present in what Tom Wolfe describes as "New Journalism." Wolfe suggests that there are four primary literary devices with which journalists enhance nonfiction narratives: scene-by-scene construction; a record of the dialogue in its entirety; utilization of the third

person point of view; and a record of the overarching patterns of behavior and possessions that expose peoples' positions in the world (Wolfe 31-32). These devices manifest in graphic journalistic works through words and illustrations.

Sacco's reconstruction of events, rather than relying strictly on verbal description, arranges them in sequential graphic panels on the page. In the style of New Journalism, Footnotes contains dialogue and quotes collected through first-person interviews or research, (although a complete record is impossible). For example, Sacco interviews an ex-guerrilla multiple times during his stay in Gaza. The interviewee "overflows with history" (50) and is frequently distracted and digressive, requiring Sacco to curate relevant information from multiple interviews. As for New Journalism's third person narrator point of view, this is complicated by Sacco's presence in the narrative. However, even as he is a character within the text, Sacco also situates himself as an outside witness or observer, with a presence that varies by degrees (Genette 245). Finally, Footnotes also explores the lives and living conditions that Sacco witnessed in the Gaza Strip.

The most obvious way in which Sacco's approach differs from Wolfe's is that he uses illustrated sequential art to depict his subject matter. This visual dimension facilitates a different kind of reader engagement. Unlike coverage of Gaza by major news outlets in the early 2000s, the illustrative component in Sacco's work – and its accompanying departure from the traditional idea of journalistic objectivity – invites readers to become participants in the story, rather than mere outsider consumers of information.

Even a cursory reading of New York Times (Greenburg; Sontag) and Washington Post (Hockstader; Schneider; Richburg) articles that reported on Gaza during the time of Sacco's research demonstrates this relative disregard for intimate human experience. The situation in Gaza is described primarily in terms of empirical data: the number of individuals killed or wounded in violent clashes. While this kind of coverage provides necessary and important information, it does not address the impact of such losses or injuries for the community.

As Mar et al argue in "Exploring the Link between Reading Fiction and Empathy," "facts-focused" expository nonfiction tends to correlate negatively with reader empathy, while fiction tends to correlate positively with reader empathy (407). In "Empathic Reactions after Reading: The Role of Genre, Personal Factors and Affective Responses," Eva Koopman argues that the narrative quality of a text, rather than its fictionality is more likely to elicit empathy, with the simulation of character experiences serving as a critical factor (66). Sacco thus encourages reader empathy in a two-fold manner: he draws

elements of fiction into his journalism and invites readers to share in his own experience by casting himself as a character.

But it is the visuality, rather than merely narrative elements, that distinguishes comics journalism. In this regard, it also differs from forms that rely on visual elements to tell stories: photojournalism and documentary film. Photographs and film traditionally convey evidence of events, while comics substitute hand-drawn images for photographs or live action. Arguably, hand-drawn images are a "less faithful" or "objective" record of historical events. In Camera Lucida, for example, Roland Barthes, argues that the photograph can serve as "authentication itself," that it possesses an evidential force in its invocation of a past reality (87). The photograph serves as "a certificate of presence" of a person, place, or thing within a historical narrative. However, as the literary critic Hillary Chute suggests in her pivotal work Disaster Drawn, that the perceived evidentiary nature of photographs derives from their mechanical objectivity (20) – the rendering is a function of unbiased technology. Chute points out that this notion fails to acknowledge that photographs and documentaries are staged (21) with the person behind the lens choosing what visual information to include within the frame. Comics journalism, however, makes no claim regarding the perfect faithfulness of its illustrations to the real.

The license comics creators are able to take in staging visual information does not negate (21) but rather deepens the truths comics journalism can convey. Sacco, like a photographer, chooses what to include in his illustrations but, by casting himself as a character, invites readers into that curation process. In so doing, he reveals the ways in which truth is malleable. Gathering his testimonies, he acknowledges that "memories [of the 1956 massacre in Khan Younis] change with the years" and that "memory blurs edges; it adds and subtracts" (Sacco Footnotes 112). Uncertainties regarding an event's granular details are a function of human memory, but this does not, Sacco asserts, invalidate the fact of the massacre (116).

**Temporality and Reader Engagement**

Another way in which comics journalism differs from photojournalism is that the latter captures and reinvokes a single instance in time. This is how photojournalism is typically presented to viewers: a single image that stands as evidence of a larger story. A single photograph is a frozen medium that signifies "time's immobilization" (Barthes 91). The world of a photograph (that which falls outside its edges and the future of that which it captures) drops off into a void at the border of the image. Barthes argues that a photograph's contents "has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred,"

suggesting "a superimposition" of past and present (77).

Chute argues that comics journalism differs from static photography because, as a sequential art form, it is animated. She explains how the structure of the comics medium transcends photographic immobilization. Comics are composed of a sequence of hand-drawn panels separated by strips of space referred to as the gutters. While the panel, in its singularity and fixedness in a frame or on a page, suggests stillness the gutters between allows the reader to "animate the relationship between [panels] that indicate time" (16). Rather than invoking a frozen past reality, comics utilize a "[panel]-gutter architecture" that "implies duration" and establishes comics as a medium that captures both stillness and movement (21).

Documentary film is, of course, also a sequential and seemingly animated form of journalism. Like photography, the fact of the events a documentary film conveys are caught up in the mechanical objectivity of the camera (this is not to deny that directors and camera operators are subjective curators). Arguably, on the level of celluloid, documentary films are like comics insofar as they also comprised of panels and gutters in sequence. But comics panels and gutters do not directly correspond to those of documentary films. The former are "a part of the creative process," while the latter are "a result of technology" (Eisner 38). Indeed, the technologically seamless mediation of reality (rather than the hand-drawn impressionistic deployment of panels and gutters) means that film viewers have the passage of time dictated to them. While it may be animated, the world of the film, just like that of a static photograph, drops off into the void at the end of its runtime. Only the past reality of the events is conveyed by the documentary film, disengaging that reality from the reader's present.

This is not the case with comics. Comics use gutters and panels to represent the passage of time. The form equates time to space (McCloud 200). The reader participates in the passage of time as they consume the work. The reader infers the duration of time within a single panel by the actions and reactions statically represented within it (95). Comics theorist Neil Cohn argues that multiple panels suggest a duration of time beyond a single moment, while multiple frames over multiple pages, in turn, suggest the accumulation of time (131). He argues that the reader's inference of the passage of time, their participation in the comic's animation, can be both conscious and unconscious, or at least that a repeated involuntary process has the potential to be catalyzed into deliberate effort (Cohn 132).

If the medium encourages readers to play a potentially active part in the passage of time, it also allows them to participate in the pace at which the work is consumed (Chute 22). This is not to discount the cartoonist's in-

fluence, however. The comics creator arranges frames, panels and gutters in spatial relationship to each other. The content, number and shape of panels allows a comics creator to affect a reader's experience of time (McCloud 101).

For example, in *Footnotes in Gaza,* Sacco slows time by placing multiple, information-dense panels on the page (a principle demonstrated by the illustration below).

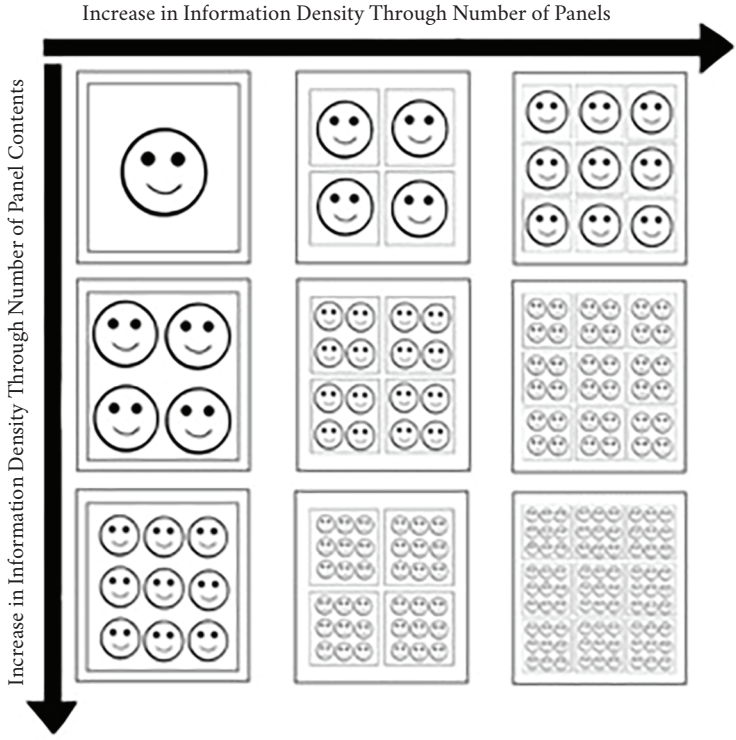


Fig 2. Panel / Information Density and the Speed of Consumption Illustration by author.

This intentional deceleration is used to draw attention to the humanity within recounted events. In slowing down the reader's rate of consumption, Sacco draws attention to the granular, individual impact of violence experienced by the Palestinians in Gaza.

For example, Sacco includes a page featuring six portraits of people he interviewed about the November 1956 violence in Rafah: Each panel contains a realistic, portrait-style illustration of the interviewee with a dialogue balloon featuring a notable line from the interview. These lines cohere into a single narrative. The interviewees face the reader direct-

ly, as though she, the reader, is the interviewer, thereby inviting her to identify with the actual interviewer, Joe Sacco. This perspective is emphasized

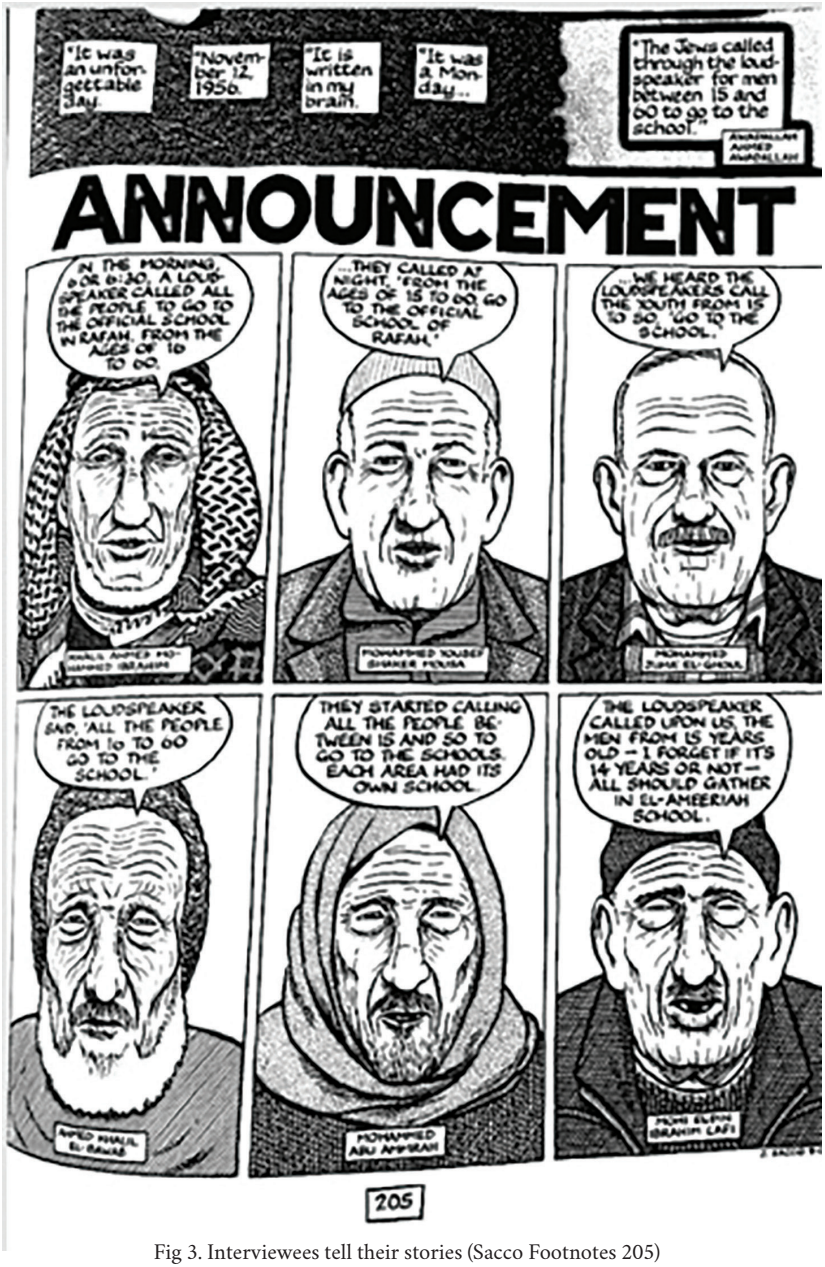


Fig 3. Interviewees tell their stories (Sacco Footnotes 205)

through repetition. The reader is invited to engage directly with subjects in the story, and they are encouraged to do so slowly by small gutters between panels, detailed portraiture, and a narrative verbal content. This density, both in the visual presentation and gravity of the subject, beckons the reader to slow down and pay attention to the accumulation of collective testimonies and the intimate, individual experience of witnesses (Tew 247).

Later, Sacco slows readers' progression through the text, through detailed panel content. A panoramic panel that stretch across two pages depicts a destroyed neighborhood that requires readers to slow down and pay attention to the scale and details of the devastation the neighborhood experienced.

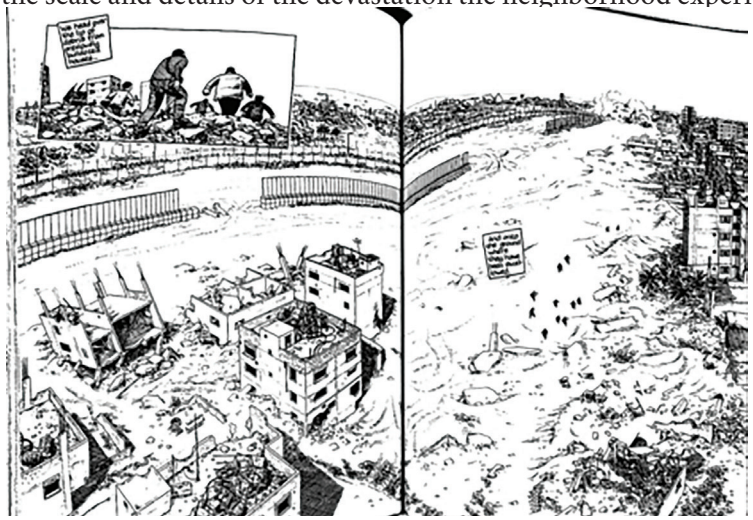

Fig 4. The scale of the devastation (Sacco Footnotes 180-181)

Photojournalism and documentary film inherently situate what they represent in a past that is disengaged from the reader's present. The events comic journalism convey may be in the past, but the reader co-recreates their passage in the present moment of reading. The distance between the world depicted and the reader's present reality narrows, as they play a critical role in the dynamism of the narrative and characters in the comic. The reader is invited into what comics scholar Hans-Christian Christiansen refers to as "a reflexive, atemporal reconstruction of meaning" (Christiansen 115).

**Photorealism versus Abstraction**

Comics journalism is further distinct from photojournalism and documentary film in that it does not offer "realistic facsimiles" of the world, but ab-

stract cartooned versions of the real. The freedom to depart from the photo-real allows for the amplification of meaning in ways not open to mechanized mediation. In Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud argues that the more realistic a replication of a human face is, the less likely the viewer is to identify with it: it is clearly the face of someone other than themselves. The generic depictions of people in comics, he suggests, are "empty shells" into "which [readers'] identity and awareness are pulled" and that, once "inhabit[ed]…enables [them] to travel" into the world that the author has created. In this case, the rea it (36).

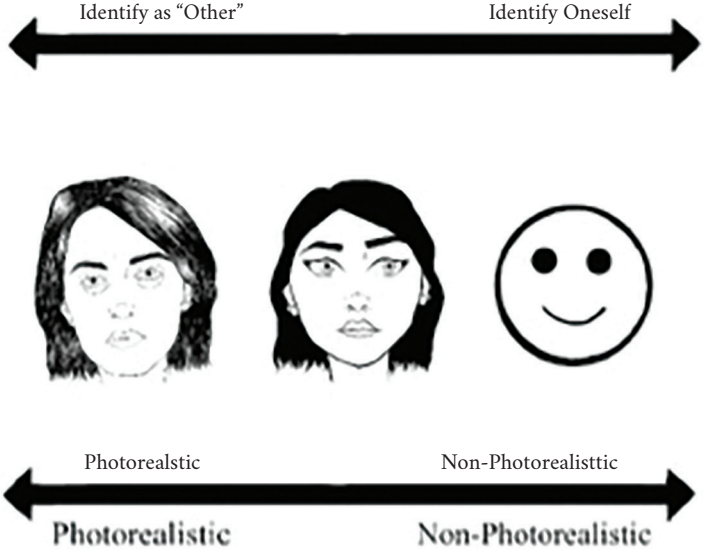


Fig 5. The negative correlation between the degree of photorealism and a viewer's identification (drawing by author, inspired by Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics).

Sacco's readers are thus allowed live out the experiences of characters in the controlled environment of the narrative. This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated in Sacco's use of what McCloud describes as the combination of non-photorealistic, cartoon depictions of people in contrast to a realistic background (43).

Sacco's two-page panorama of a Rafah neighborhood in the wake of its destruction by Israeli Defense Forces, or IDF (Fig. 4) is a case in point. Ostensibly demolished because they hid tunnels "used to resist Israeli incursion," Sacco contextualizes the destruction within the history of the region and the experience of contemporary residents. Beginning with the flight of

Palestinian refugees to the Gaza region during the 1948 Palestine War, Sacco chronicles the development of Rafah neighborhoods from a series of blanket-covered holes in the ground to communities forced to build "into the streets and up" to accommodate their swelling population (Sacco Footnotes 28-30). Sacco contrasts his illustrations of overcrowded homes and people subject to limited resources with depictions of own six-bedroom, three-bathroom temporary living arrangement – "a palace" – in Rafah (155).

In a follow-up visit to a Rafah neighborhood known as Block J, Sacco discovers that the modest homes that once stood there had been bulldozed (Fig 4). Dominating two pages, the panel suggests the enormous spatial dimension of the destruction and enhances the narrative atmosphere (Eisner 47). A single frame in the upper left corner of the panel overlays the sky. It depicts five figures with their backs to the viewer walking into the wreckage of what Sacco previously depicted as a bustling community. The reader's gaze is drawn in the direction the characters are moving, encouraging her to identify with them.

Twelve indistinguishable silhouettes appear on the facing page, dwarfed by the immensity of the destruction. The reader is encouraged by the interplay of illustration and text to associate these 12 figures with the 5 in the overlay panel. In contrast to the densely detailed illustration of the panel, text only appears in two places. First it appears in a text box that overlays the panel in the top right-hand corner of the panorama. A second text box appears next to the 12 figures on the facing page. The text in these two boxes, together, form a complete sentence: "We head over the lip of debris from previously bulldozed houses…" (180), "and onto the ground where they have been swallowed" (181). This grammatical continuity makes clear that the figures on the facing page are the same as those with whom the reader previously identified. The textual arrangement directs the reader across the destruction's scale to the human figures who are dwarfed by it. The text in Sacco's work often serves to enhance his illustrations. As Will Eisner suggests in Comics and Sequential Art, text can function as an extension of imagery, providing "the mood, a narrative bridge, and the implication of sound" (Eisner 10). In this instance, the text draws the reader into identification with abstractly rendered human figures as they navigate their demolished neighborhood.

**Conclusion: Comics Journalism makes Sense of the Senselessness**

If the pared-down, abstract images of humans against realistic backdrops pull the reader into the sensual world of the comic (McCloud 39-41), then Sacco's homodiegetic presence (Round 323 ) in Footnotes facilitates the reader's critical distance from the stories they encounter there. Readers often

observe events and characters from Sacco's perspective (as exemplified above in Fig. 3). Like Sacco, they are outside observers of everyday life and of witness testimony. The reader thus adopts a homodiegetic point of view: in this case the narrator who is a character in the narrative is a journalist, a self-reflexive witness to the story, and not a traumatized survivor of the violence. Footnotes couples the empathetic pull of pared-down illustrations of humans with the emotional distance of Sacco's homodiegetic perspective. This coupling of immersion and distance allows readers to begin making sense of the senseless violence to which they bear witness.

The scale and horror of the November 1956 massacres in Khan Younis and Rafah defy conventional descriptions. Readers would be forgiven for not wanting to immerse themselves in trauma too massive and monstrous to contend with. To fully grasp the broad scope and intimate experience of the events in Gaza is to risk being overwhelmed, as Edmund Burke suggests the human mind can be by the sublime. The horrors of the massacres could produce "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 33). Such fear might stop readers from engaging the experience of Palestinians altogether, thereby hindering their ability to empathize. Conventional print journalism protects its readers from identifying too deeply by telling the story of violence in quantitative terms.

Sacco does not shy away from the emotional, cultural, and material fact of the violence. Death and trauma are explicit everywhere in the testimonies of survivors and in his illustrations. But Sacco's homodiegetic presence acts as a kind of buffer between the reader and trauma. He invites readers into his perspective, pulling them from a too-direct identification with the pain of traumatized survivors. Sacco frequently depicts his own bespectacled eyes as blank circles, inviting the reader to inhabit his perspective, that of an outsider who is trying to understand the pain he witnesses. As a comics journalist, then, Sacco clearly understands his role to be mediation between the lived experience of his subjects and the reader. The comics medium allows him to facilitate empathy between people on opposite sides of the world, who are very unlikely to meet otherwise.

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# Beyond "Infinite Security": Freedom in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*

By Allison Lee

As a young person coming of age, Esther, the protagonist of Sylia Plath's The Bell Jar, confronts her freedom. Initially, during her internship in New York City and later as she recovers from mental illness at a hospital Esther begins to doubt that she has a consistent center. She realizes she has no such inherent essence: that she must create herself through her choices and actions. This uncomfortable freedom fills Esther with fear that she will fail to fulfill her hopes for herself, and that being a woman will prevent her from becoming independent. This article will examine Esther's dilemma through the lens of existentialist feminism.

Esther's fear is not unfounded: her society believes that women should be passive counterparts to active men. Esther's boyfriend, Buddy Willard, repeats his mother's conventional beliefs about gender: "What a man wants is a mate and what a woman wants is infinite security," and "What a man is is an arrow into the future and what a woman is is the place the arrow shoots off from" (Plath 80). In Buddy's mother's understanding, men depend on women for support, and women are defined by their servile relationship to men. Women are told they are important, but only insofar as they act in the interests of men. They are not encouraged to have personal ambition or to find meaning in their lives independently. As the "place the arrow shoots off from," women are encouraged to stay in their place while the men in their lives pursue their own projects.

Not only are women told that they should assume a subservient role, but that they should be satisfied with it, that they should be fulfilled by "infinite security." To persuade Esther of her role as a woman, Buddy tells her that "his mother still got pleasure out of his father and wasn't that wonderful for people their age, it must mean she really knew what was what" (80). Al-

though women seem happy, especially to the men in their lives— their happiness is not evidence that the gender roles the adopt are in their best interest. According to Simone de Beauvoir, "it is always easy to call a situation that one would like to impose on others happy… we declare happy those condemned to stagnation, under the pretext that happiness is immobility" (de Beauvoir 16). According to de Beauvoir, then, we should evaluate the position of women in society not in terms of their happiness, but in terms of their freedom to define themselves as they choose to.

In The Bell Jar, women must contend with the assumption that they are inherently suited to their subservient roles. However, existentialist philosophers like de Beauvoir believe that there is no such thing as an inherent human essence, much less a feminine one. They argue that people are responsible for creating who they are through their choices and actions. They critique the ways that ideas of human essences have been used to limit people to categories and behaviors that accord with who they "inherently" are. To the existentialists it is impossible for a person, or subjects, to be truly stagnant. As de Beauvoir writes, "[e] very subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion toward an indefinitely open future" (16). We are all in a state of perpetual becoming (transcendence) in accordance with our choices and actions (projects). Who we are at any one moment (our "present existence") is important only as the basis for perpetual future transcendence.

However, in The Bell Jar, assumptions about feminine essences means that women are expected to stagnate. That women are want "infinite security" suggests they "inherently" dislike constant change, whereas men are thought of as "arrows into the future." The denial of women's freedom and women's compliance with conventional gender roles is what de Beauvoir considers "degradation of existence into 'in-itself,' of freedom into facticity" (16). The society in The Bell Jar attempts to reduce women by imposing a feminine essence (womanhood in-itself) upon them. The patriarchy reiterates and sustains the idea of a feminine essence by determining the material circumstances (the facticity) to which women are subject. They are treated as unchanging, utilitarian objects that serve to facilitate the freedom of men and should not imagine themselves as more. This denial of women's freedom is a form of oppression and makes it difficult for women to live in what the existentialists call "good faith," to accept responsibility for their own lives, to define themselves through their choices and actions.

The Bell Jar charts Esther's decline into mental illness as she struggles to confront her freedom, as well as her eventual embrace of it. Realizing that

she is condemned to make choices, she is unwilling to take full responsibility because she is too afraid that the obstacles she faces as a woman will keep her from becoming who she wants to be. She does not want to be responsible for her own failure. And yet she cannot forget what she has learned: she cannot deceive herself into believing that she does not have freedom. Her difficulty, then, and what the reader is challenged to understand about Esther, is to come to terms with it.

Esther begins to question traditional gender roles when she learns that her boyfriend Buddy was unfaithful to her. She finds out that he had an affair with a waitress. Before his confession, Esther believed that Buddy was "pure," a virgin like herself, since both he and his mother promoted sexual abstinence until marriage (Plath 79). Submitting to expectation, she "took everything Buddy Willard told [her] as the honest-to-God truth" (Plath 63), no matter how disrespectful he was to her. She understood him as "always trying to explain things to [her] and introduce [her] to new knowledge" (76). Before the confession, Esther had internalized Buddy's reputation, his status as a man, and saw the world from his perspective instead of through her own subjectivity. Content to accept gendered social mores, she assumed a passive, submissive role.

Buddy's confession is relayed to readers in Esther's reminiscence at a banquet at Ladies' Day magazine: she is now an intern in New York City. In this later context she is unsure how staying pure or being in a traditional romantic relationship would benefit her. It is clear to her that men are allowed to have a "double life," one pure and one impure, while women are limited to one pure life (90). But Buddy's infidelity disgusts Esther less than his hypocrisy: he pretended to be pure and less sexually experienced than her when he was really the more promiscuous one. She decided to "ditch" him for not having the "honest guts to admit it straight off to everybody and face up to it as part of his character" (80). She loathes him for behaving in a way contrary to the beliefs he proclaimed. However, Esther makes the mistake of viewing Buddy's hypocrisy as inherent to his nature. To her, Buddy is his hypocrisy. This suggests that she sees people's identities as essential and stable. In response to Buddy's hypocrisy, Esther wants to act according to the values she believes to be true to herself (de Beauvoir's "in-itself"), but she soon realizes that she has no true identity and no inherent essence.

In New York, Esther becomes destabilized when she tries to decide her future. She realizes that she is free to act in ways contrary to her earlier understanding of herself. Throughout her adolescence, she played the role of a good student destined for literary and academic success. Her sense of personal identity came from her academic ambitions. She once convinced herself

that "studying and reading and writing and working like mad was what [she] wanted to do, and it actually seemed to be true" (35). She talked herself into being a good student, as if that was her purpose in life and her identity. Now, during her internship, she is much less certain of herself. When her editor Jay Cee asks her what she wants to do after she graduates Esther, who used to have ambitious plans on the tip of her tongue, replies that she does not know what she wants to do (35).

Esther realizes that her ambition was a habit rather than an honest appraisal of her desires. To Esther, the reply that she did not know what she wanted to do,

> When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray? Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or best characters of a group? Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them? (*Crisis* 219)

For Esther, aimlessness was once a peripheral and unremarkable (nondescript) notion. Recognizing now that she is aimless is a revelation (her "real father") that make her earlier ambitions seem false like a sham father. Esther deceived herself into believing her ambitions were obviously good. But she was clearly suspicious to a degree: doubt, like the "real father" was "hanging around". Some part of her had always known that her identity was a performance into which she became unconsciously absorbed, rather than based on good faith choices and actions. Now that she has given in to not knowing what she wants, her earlier expressions of tenacity and ambition feel "hollow" and "sepulchral," evidence of the very hypocrisy she despises.

Esther now understands that she must create herself through her choices and actions but is anguished at the possibilities. She imagines her future branching out like a fig tree holding many figs, each one representing a possible future for herself: "I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet" (86). The image of the figs rotting and falling shows how even her indecision has consequences in the world. Whether she wants to or not, she must choose a future direction just as she must choose a fig before they are all unsalvageable. Nobody can choose except for her, and no choice is objectively correct or incorrect.

Later, on a date with Constantin, she willfully dismisses the idea that she must choose and she attributes her vision of the fig tree to "the profound void of an empty stomach" (87). Seemingly just describing hunger, her word choice reminds us of another kind of emptiness: the nothingness of consciousness, of subjectivity without essence. There is nothing inherent to her except for a consciousness that has no predetermined qualities. It is up to her to create meaning, to become someone, through choices and actions. The stakes and responsibility of this perpetual choosing is a source of anxiety to her. She suddenly tells Constantin that she plans to "learn German and go to Europe and be a war correspondent like Maggie Higgins" (87). But this is a non-committal assertion, something she "finds [herself]" saying rather than an entirely conscious, considered choice. Compelled by anguish, she plays at choosing direction for herself as if doing so is a way to evade her newly realized freedom.

Esther's anxiety is heightened by the difficulty of achieving the goals she does have set for herself. She aspires to become a great writer and scholar and looks forward to a writing course she describes as "a bright, safe bridge over the dull gulf of the summer" (127). When she is notified that she has not been accepted she sees the bridge "totter and dissolve, and a body in a white blouse and green skirt plummet into the gap". If the bridge represents the aspirations that sustain her, the plummeting body represents Esther's crisis of identity. She is condemned to confront her innate freedom and responsibility when it is already so difficult for her to be who she wants to be.

The main obstacle Esther encounters is the patriarchal culture. She feels objectified by men and observes other women limited to their facticity. Esther comes to fear that because of her gender, her plans and desires are irrelevant. This realization leads her into a state of despair. She resists her freedom and denies her responsibility because she feels she is unlikely to accomplish her goals. Instead of embracing her freedom and making choices and taking actions to define herself, she identifies as an object of her society's injustices.

The risk of pregnancy is another major obstacle. Esther feels trapped in her female body and feels that her reproductive system is a tool by which men control her. After her anguish turns into depression and suicidality (which will be addressed soon), she tells her doctor Ruth Nolan in the mental hospital, "a man doesn't have a worry in the world, while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line" (247). Esther suspects that becoming pregnant and having children will lead her into a life of drudgery and subjugation.

The novel frames pregnancy and childbirth as oppressive and dehumanizing. The pregnant body is often described as an object, alienated from

the woman's free will. For example, Esther describes her neighbor Dodo, who is always pregnant, as "grotesque", "a sparrow egg perched on a duck egg" (95). The horror of childbirth is depicted most vividly in a flashback: Esther and Buddy watch a woman named Mrs. Tomatillo give birth at his school's laboratory. Esther emphasizes the otherness of Mrs. Tomatillo, who is under an anesthetic which puts her in a "twilight sleep". She is described in dehumanized terms, with a "spider-fat stomach," making an "inhuman whooing noise." The male doctors tell Esther that the woman is unconscious and does not feel pain despite the noises she is making. However, Esther doubts their claim:

> Here was a woman in terrible pain, obviously feeling every bit of it and she would go straight home and start another baby, because the drug would make her forget how bad the pain had been, when all the time, in some secret part of her, that long, blind, doorless and windowless corridor of pain was waiting to open up and shut her in again. (73)

To Esther, Mrs. Tomatillo's "twilight state" suggests her silencing by the patriarchy: a male-invented drug shuts her up in a "corridor of pain." Accordingly, she thinks, Mrs. Tomatillo will carry this pain inside of herself, unable to articulate it because men have taken away her ability to do so. The twilight state allows the men to disregard her pain: her howls are unconscious and therefore, to them, not genuine expressions. In regarding her in this way, they reduce her entirely to her facticity. She is only a body, easier to manage when thought of as such.

The patriarchal culture attempts to control women's relationship with their own reproductive systems. The doctor alienates Mrs. Tomatillo from conscious awareness of her trauma. He also tries to limit Esther's access to the birth. He says to her, "You oughtn't to see this...You'll never want to have a baby if you do. They oughtn't to let women watch. It'll be the end of the human race" (72). The patriarchy doesn't want women to understand their situation in the world. It wants women to believe that their essential purpose is to bear children. It frames birth as is beautiful and noble, when it is really gruesome and painful. It does all this so that for women motherhood is the obvious fulfilment of their lives. It is better to keep women ignorant, they seem to think, because informed women may become aware of their freedom, and will be less compliant. To Esther, motherhood is associated with ignorance. She compares motherhood and housewifery to being "brainwashed… slave… in some private totalitarian state" (95). Esther therefore questions whether freedom is at all possible for mothers. But even with this awareness,

she does not feel that she has the choice to remain childless. Motherhood is perceived to be the proper destiny for women, and she lacks access to birth control. Esther feels reduced by the patriarchal imposition of womanhood in-itself and oppressed by her facticity.

Esther's despair leads to her feeling alienated from herself. She compares herself to a pickled baby in a jar she saw when she visited Buddy's medical school lab. She observes herself from this estranged perspective, the same way the students in the lab examine the fetuses. She is a curiosity, suspended, familiar in some respects but grotesque in others. But she also takes the perspective of the fetus: According to Esther "to the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream" (265). The bad dream, the patriarchy and its vision of the world, fixes her in place with their gaze: to them she is an object with no agency, incapable of choice and actions, contained and preserved as the infant is by glass and formaldehyde. In this metaphor, Esther cuts herself off from her agency. She allows herself to be completely dictated to, to be rendered blank and stopped by the misogynistic gaze. With her freedom disregarded by society, she and other women are objects that are controlled by external forces.

Esther's despair becomes too severe for her to bear. Overwhelmed by her freedom, she lives in bad faith, justifying inaction by accepting the terms of her facticity and fleeing her responsibility in the process. In the second half of the novel, her behavior and thoughts are frequently irrational. For example, she creates and "play-acts" characters so as not to have to confront her own anguish, and in the mistaken belief that the choices the character makes are not her own. Back in her hometown after her time in New York City, and in a worse mental condition, Esther pretends to be a made-up person named Elly, and becomes completely absorbed in the role. She imagines changing her name permanently and moving to Chicago to live among its "unconventional, mixed-up people" who "would love me for my sweet, quiet nature. They wouldn't be after me to read books and write long papers... And one day I might just marry… and have a big cowy family...if I happened to feel like it" (148).

The role-playing is attractive to Esther even if Elly fails: housewifery represents submission to the patriarchy, a failure to live freely (not an actual choice), and the relinquishing of self-determination. .Elly who falters to the idea that becoming a conventional middle-class suburban housewife is a "choice" even as Esther recognizes that women do not "happen to feel like" marrying and having children, but that the desire is imposed upon them. Elly seeks refuge from the rigors of academic or literary success, even as, for Esther becoming a scholar and writer is a difficult but better faith choice.

Though Esther knows that Elly is a fantasy and that actually becoming her would be unrealistic, her obsessive role playing suggests her desire to escape the burdens of freedom, to be someone else whose life is simpler because she does not recognize or care about her own oppression.

For Esther, an atheist, religion provides another kind of play-acting. Before her suicide attempt, she briefly contemplates converting to Catholicism even though she does not believe in the doctrine. For her, religion provides another potential escape from freedom, one she imagines could have saved her anguish had she given in to it earlier. However, to her disappointment, "the Catholic Church, didn't take up the whole of [her] life… [she] still had to eat three meals a day and have a job and live in the world" (184). Now she fantasizes about throwing herself at the feet of a priest and saying "O Father, help me." The church, she thinks "might have a good way to persuade [her] out of [committing suicide]." Since Esther does not believe in the authority of the priest or the Catholic Church she is only playing at her supplication. The impulse to do so, however suggests her lack of faith in her own choices, and her longing for a father figure in the priest to affirm her desire to live indeed, she visits her own father's grave before attempting to kill herself But to ask the church validate her life would be to submit to the patriarchy, to to accept its reasoning would be to deny her freedom. In this way, religion would be a substitute for suicide, a death of the self, a , an evasion of a choice for which she is responsible. Ultimately, Esther cannot deceive herself into ignorance of her freedom, nor can she elude the fact that she is responsible for her own life's meaning. Fearing inevitable failure she attempts suicide. The only way to be liberated from freedom and responsibility is to be devoid of consciousness, to become literally "blank and stopped" like the infants in formaldehyde. The meaning of her life would no longer be her own responsibility. According to Sartre, when one dies, one loses the freedom to change the meaning of one's life. The meaning of one's life is then determined by the living: "to die is to exist only through the Other, and to owe to him one's meaning" (Sartre 544). Esther's death would be a double-edged sword. Lacking agency altogether, a literal object, she would be freed of her responsibilities, but she would be no less subject to the judgement of the world.

Esther's suicide attempt fails, and she wakes up in a mental hospital where she chooses to exist without illusions. As part of her recovery, she begins to accept responsibility for her life and to confront her freedom to create herself. Literary critic Susan Coyle has noted that Esther's "obsessive sense of self has been left behind, and the new self is more concerned with what she will be doing" (Coyle 162). Her psychiatrist Doctor Nolan (notably, a woman) plays a crucial role in helping Esther embrace her freedom. Nolan helps her

value her subjectivity, since she does not impose morality or act as if she is wiser than Esther. For example, when Esther tells her that she hates her mother, Nolan doesn't reprimand her for expressing emotions that falls short of the patriarchal ideal of mother / daughter relationships, nor does she assume to the authority to tell Esther what she is really feeling. Nolan just smiles and says, "I suppose you do" (Plath 227). In addition, Nolan provides Esther with resources that will help her deal with her facticity as she pursues her goals. After Nolan gives her a diaphragm to use as birth control, Esther feels that she is "climbing to freedom" and that she is her "own woman" (249). Although she has always had the freedom to create herself, having access to birth control helps her to be assured of that freedom; she no longer believes she is utterly subject to her facticity.

Esther learns not to overemphasize rites of passage society deems important as determining her sense of worth. rituals deemed important by society. At first, Esther believed that losing her virginity was necessary to becoming an adult. When she actually loses her virginity, it does not feel like a rite of passage. It is painful and she ends up in the hospital because of a hemorrhage. The episode suggests to Esther that that she need not be defined by her relations with a man. In addition, the belief that losing your virginity somehow changes who you intrinsically are is incompatible with a life lived in good faith. It imposes the significance of an event in one's life on the basis of an external patriarchal code, rather than leaving the subject free to determine the meaning on her own terms.

Still in the mental hospital, Esther tries to invent her own "ritual for being born twice," (an effort not encouraged by Doctor Nolan) (272). The desire to invent her own ritual rather than relying on existing rituals suggests that she is taking ownership of the ways her life attains significance. Despite her uncertainty about her future, she begins to take responsibility for the decisions that will create her. The novel ends with Esther being interviewed to determine if she is ready to leave the hospital, leaving the reader to wonder if she is strong enough to deal with the freedom she cannot deny since it is inseparable from human consciousness. Has she embraced the many possible futures she could live, rather than allowing herself to be stifled by a patriarchal society The Bell Jar shows through the character of Esther how difficult it can be to bear the weight of creating the significance of one's life, while being subject to patriarchally determined notions of womanhood-in-itself and the facticity that sustains it. After various attempts to evade her freedom fail, she is on the path to valuing her own subjectivity, and to taking responsibility for her own choices and actions.

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# “Be Someone”: Murals, Community, and Houston

By Zoie Buske

Walls act as a division between the inside and the outside: a shop and the street, a home and a back yard, a fine arts museum and the world. For much of history, walls have been associated with defense. They have existed as boundaries between a proverbial “us” and “them,” the community and its enemies. Especially in contemporary American political rhetoric walls have become associated with the polarization and partitioning of places and people.

However, the significance of a wall shifts dramatically when something is created upon it. Imagery can transcend linguistic, social, generational, and even class divisions. When a wall that acts as a barrier is adorned with imagery that transcends differences, the paradox that comes into being is attention-grabbing. While the wall still demarcates space, it no longer exists solely for this function, and now stands as an immersive artwork with the potential to reflect a community’s values, needs, and desires.

When such an immersive artwork is experienced in public space, a subsequent paradoxical event takes place. Traditionally, what is considered “High Art” (henceforth, just High Art, which will be discussed in more detail) is set apart from the general populace: literally, in museums and private collections, or figuratively, given its perceived intellectual inaccessibility. A mural can therefore serve to democratize art, making it accessible to viewers regardless of their physical access or their prior knowledge. Murals thus have the potential to speak to broad audiences in ways High Art does not.

Two public artworks that speak to Houstonians are the Be Someone bridge and the People of The Community mural. The Be Someone bridge stretches across the I-45 South Highway. In bright turquoise lettering, it spells out the imperative, “Be Someone”. Once a mundane train bridge covered in a myriad of graffiti tags, the bridge wall has become a cherished Houston

landmark. The People of The Community mural at Blackshear Elementary School in Houston's Third Ward extends two hundred and fifty feet, and features portraits of fifty-five locals painted on a grand scale. Houston lives and breathes alongside the People of The Community mural and underneath the Be Someone bridge. As the city thrives, grieves, triumphs, and changes, it is in constant conversation with these works of art, and they, in turn, reflect the dynamic politics and cultures of Houston and its people.

The work of philosopher Walter Benjamin is useful to understand how murals interact differently with their audiences than High Art. In his 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin introduces the idea of "cult value" in relation to works of art and artistic practice. "Cult value" he explains, stems from the historic, and even pre-historic utilization of art in religious practices. The artwork, whether an image of an elk chalked onto the wall of a cave, or a statue of the Madonna meant only for the eyes of the clergy, was intended to facilitate a communion between humans and the gods they worshipped. Deities, not the artist's fellow humans, were the intended audience. Though art is no longer necessarily dependent on its religious roots, the spiritual, transcendent, and even mystical qualities of religious art, Benjamin argues, still resonate in the way art is understood, even in its secular manifestation. The religious beginnings of artistic practice, its setting aside from the general populace in favor of the elite eyes of clergy and gods, have left a residue of elevated inaccessibility upon traditional fine art. Benjamin calls this elevated inaccessibility, the artwork's "Aura".

Aura, Benjamin explains, is the pervasive cultural impression that traditional fine art is lofty and untouchable (hence, High Art). It is the mysterious quality that walls off an artwork, that supposedly elevates it beyond the grasp of the general populace. The concept of aura applies to any aspect of an artwork that leads to its near-sacralization. Its material existence and significance thereby transcend the realm of the ordinary, thereby alienating general viewers from the artwork (Benjamin).

Benjamin viewed the destruction of the aura positively. Indeed, for him, the fetishization of art imbues it with sometimes oppressive power. This fetishization is evident in the careful preservation of artworks, the insistence that they never be touched by untrained hands. The reasoning is sound. For example, untrained hands would wreak havoc on fragile artworks such as the Sistine Chapel ceiling (arguably, also a mural of sorts, but one to which access is restricted). However, the fetishization of High Art also demands that viewers approach it with ritual reverential awe. Museum patrons speak in hushed tones around canvases by venerated artists, shuffling somberly past their bright, playful, dynamic, exultant canvases. So powerful is High Art's aura, in

this instance, that viewers cannot fully commune with it. Benjamin resents that High Art is imbued with such power. He argues that while art should continue to be appreciated and to play a significant role in society and culture, it should not be venerated to the point of unapproachability (Benjamin).

Though Benjamin wrote his essay in 1935, the aura he describes continues to be pervasive, as is clear in the current era of art collection. Today, High Art is collected by the ultra-rich and placed in private collections. Recently, Jeff Koons' Rabbit was sold at Christie's in New York for $91.1 million (O'Connor, Koons), a record for a work by a living artist. A Claude Monet painting recently sold for more than $110.7 million (O'Connor, Monet). Graffiti artist Banksy, shocked at the price his own work commanded at a 2018 Sotheby's auction, took to Instagram and quoted art critic Robert Hughes:

> Art should make us feel more clearly and more intelligently. It should give us coherent sensations that we otherwise would not have had. But the price of a work of art is now part of its function, its new job is to sit on the wall and get more expensive. Instead of being the common property of humankind the way a book is, art becomes the particular property of somebody who can afford it. Suppose that every worthwhile book in the world cost $1 million – imagine what a catastrophic effect on culture that would have. (Flash News)

This is not to suggest that art should not be sold nor artists supported. However, the critique Hughes presents is that High Art has become something to which only the elite have access. The price of an artwork is now an aspect of its aura, elevating it beyond the grasp of the general populace.

Museums, too, perpetuate the aura of High Art. This is not to suggest that museums actively refuse the general populace access like private collections do. In fact, museums work exceptionally hard to bring people into the presence of High Art, with many programs that intentionally engage the community. However, the museum space inherently perpetuates the aura of High Art by regulating the interactions of patrons with the works.

Museums and galleries regulate a viewer's movements and actions. Not only is the environment carefully controlled for the preservation and safety of the works, but the visitor's movements are also modulated. Under the watchful eyes of guards and docents, viewers understand that they must comply with certain behavioral expectations. Touching the works, running, screaming, laughing, are actively discouraged. Furthermore, the museum space is designed to direct the flow of human traffic in a certain manner.

Often individual galleries are designed to direct viewer from entrance to exit in a clockwise motion (Dove). Such regulations are meant to create positive experiences for viewers, but they ritualize the way in which artworks are viewed and perpetuate the idea that High Art is to be venerated (Benjamin).

Benjamin hoped that mechanical reproduction of High Art would undermine the aura with which those artworks were imbued. With countless reproductions available there is no need to travel to, for example, the Louvre to view the Mona Lisa. In the age of the machine, anyone can hang a print of da Vinci's iconic painting on their wall. In Benjamin's analysis, such universal access to High Art (or reproductions of High Art) should dissipate its sacrosanct quality. (Benjamin). And yet, nearly a hundred years after Benjamin wrote his essay, with the Mona Lisa accessible through a quick internet search, thirty-thousand people a day push past each other in the Louvre to see the original painting, to be in its venerable presence. The aura of the Mona Lisa is so powerful that it alone is responsible for bringing in around eighty percent of the Louvre's visitors (Réouverture De La Salle).

Murals, though they adorn physical walls, have the potential to demolish the barrier that aura builds between artworks and their viewers. The ways viewers interact with murals in public spaces is antithetical to the inaccessibility of private collections or highly regulated encounters in museums.

Though they are paintings, which is traditionally considered a High Art form, murals subvert the idea that art's worth is tied to its monetary value: they are set in public space. They are therefore also widely accessible. Whether the viewer is driving under a captioned bridge or passing a brilliantly painted elementary school exterior wall, the art becomes incorporated in the viewer's everyday existence. Furthermore, a public mural does not exist in a highly regulated space. It is a fixed entity in a changing world. Their settings are subject to many changes, from weather conditions, to the speed of traffic, to the growth, decline and rejuvenation of their neighborhoods. Murals become parts of their environment. They are not set apart or set above the commonplace. They are integral to their communities and speak to them in an intimate manner that High Art cannot.

Viewers physically interact with murals in fundamentally different ways than they do with High Art in a gallery space. While the formal elements of a mural can guide the viewer's body, the public setting of murals do not regulate the viewer's behavior as museums or galleries do. Children run around them, and visitors can be as loud as they wish. Viewers are welcome to touch them, reaching up and feeling the rough stone or metal surface that exists under the paint. Individuals drive their cars by murals or look out of bus windows to catch a fleeting glimpse of a magnificent, colossal work. The

lack of intentionality on the part of the viewer, they rarely seek out the mural specifically, means that the mural is integral to their everyday life.

The formal elements of murals further contribute to their radical accessibility compared to High Art. Most other works of art, such as a painting or a sculpture, simply occupy space: it is easy for a viewer to overlook a framed painting hanging in a museum. A wall, however, denotes space, constituting its very parameters. It is much more difficult to overlook a wall. To do so is to risk walking into it. The artwork encompasses a passerby's entire visual plane and towers above their body. Paintings typically have formal elements that guide the viewer's eye, while murals use the same formal elements to guide the viewer's entire body: they must move around to fully experience the work. A mural is not simply gazed upon, it is interacted with, making viewing the art an active and immersive experience.

These attributes also make it possible for murals to deliver powerful messages to and from the community in which they exist. Art set in public space inherently "reflects the stories and histories we most want to tell ourselves, the lessons we want to learn, the pride we collectively hold, and the memories and priorities with which we craft into our communities future" (Public Art). Because murals are a part of everyday life, and not set apart from it, they are able to communicate the desires of a community more clearly and effectively than art that has been set apart.

Passing by the People of The Community mural on the wall of Blackshear Elementary School in Houston's Third Ward, viewers are greeted by the first portrait the artist painted: a little African American girl with colorful beaded braids and bright blue eyes, an elated smile on her face. Her mother and her younger sisters are painted standing next to her.

Anat Ronen, People of The Community Mural, 2015. 250x18. Blackshear Elementary, Houston Texas. Photographed by Anat Ronen.

Walking along the wall, the viewer sees another ear-to-ear smile, this one from under the thick mustache and white bucket hat of an older man. A short distance further, the viewer encounters a woman with bright blue fingernails taking a picture, her cellphone case a vibrant pink. A little later, the viewer meets a young woman with kind brown eyes whose head is adorned with a blue and white floral hijab. The last of the fifty-five portraits is of a teenage boy listening to music though his earbuds, beaming out at the street.

Some of the mural's subjects laugh, the little ones look out curiously, a few look a bit sheepish. Inconspicuously peering out from behind the crowd, partially obscured by the braided hair of a young girl, is the face of the artist herself, Anat Ronen (Ronen).

Anat Ronen, People of The Community Mural, 2015. 250x18. Blackshear Elementary, Houston Texas. Photographed by Anat Ronen.

Anat Ronen was given complete freedom to paint what she wanted on the exterior wall of Blackshear Elementary (Arts Insight). Ronen's typical subject matter ranges from nature scenes and larger than life animals to portraits of such activists and leaders as Malala Yousafzai, Jane Goodall and President Barack Obama. Undoubtedly, the mural would have been beautiful had she chosen to paint natural imagery or portraits of famous people. But the mural's resonance is greatly enhanced by her decision to paint portraits of people from the community. These massive portraits are of Houstonians, people who live in the community that surrounds Blackshear Elementary. Initially, Ronen painted a family whose children attended the school. Before long, members of the surrounding neighborhood approached her to be included in the mural, too (Arts Insight). Ronen would photograph the residents, archive the photographs, and when possible, add them to the mural. The immense power of Ronen's project is that it claims a part of the city "overlooked by most, and [gives] it cultural value" (Public Art).

Pictures being taken of potential models for the mural. Photograph taken by Anat Ronen affiliates, 2015.

The Third Ward of Houston is a culturally rich area. It is the home of Houston's NAACP, and was one of the first places in Texas where African American students sat down at white lunch counters to protest segregation. The Third Ward also contains Emancipation Park, an amenity that was purchased by freed slaves to commemorate the cessation of slavery in Texas. However, despite this rich history, the Third Ward is notoriously impoverished. In fact, 42.6% of the residents in the Third Ward fall below the poverty line (Third Ward Initiative). The Third Ward is also crime-ridden: it has been labeled the 15th most dangerous community in the United States (Kim). The social, political, and economic problems of the Third Ward often seem too large to handle. Given the scale of the issues in the Third Ward, its residents are commonly reduced to demographics, talked about as numbers and statistics (see earlier in this paragraph). The individuality and the agency of its every resident are thus largely glossed over.

While the needs of the Third Ward's residents go largely unnoticed, its land does not. Quickly, and to the unease of many of its residents, the Third Ward is being gentrified (Binkovitz). While the new shops, apartment buildings, and houses promise to encourage the economic growth of the area and a likely lowering of the crime rate, for many of the residents, it means having to leave their homes. As new developers move in, property taxes and rents will rise. Those living below the poverty line who have called the Third Ward home for generations will not be able to afford to live there anymore (Binkov-

itz). Not solely glossed over, often the residents of the Third Ward are treated as though they are expendable.

The joy of the faces on the mural is therefore especially striking given its setting. The poverty of the area is not difficult to see. Across the street from the mural are boarded up shops and abandoned buildings. Garbage litters the street near the metro stop that sits parallel with the brilliant mural. The Third Ward's neglect is starkly contrasted by the resilience of its people. Indeed, the People of The Community mural demonstrates the value of every single person that makes up the Third Ward community: they are painted in monumental proportions. The People of The Community mural thus rehumanizes a community too often reduced to its problems by depicting the faces, personalities, and joy of Third Ward residents. Ronen's mural reminds the people of the Third Ward what is truly important in the macro-scale policy discussions about poverty, crime, and gentrification: it's them.

While the People of The Community mural addresses primarily the residents of the Third Ward, the Be Someone bridge addresses all Houstonians who pass under it. Thousands of people who commute into Downtown Houston along I-45 South see the Be Someone bridge every day in addition to their first glimpse of the Houston skyline. Bold letters that spell out "BE SOMEONE" extend over the highway. The bright turquoise typeface starkly contrasts with the rusting steel panes of the bridge's exterior facade. The artist has made the thick black outline of his lettering diagonally receded into space, creating the illusion that the letters possess a moderate three-dimensionality. Though the bridge itself is owned by the Union Pacific railroad, the message is something that Houstonians claim for themselves (Hlavaty).

The Be Someone bridge is not a commissioned work like the People of The Community mural. Anat Ronen did her work in the light of day largely supported by an interested community. The Be Someone bridge, however, had to be done at night, with the artist precariously dangling over the side of the Union Pacific railroad bridge, accompanied by a lookout to watch for trains and the police (Lodhia).

The "Be Someone" message first appeared in September of 2012, painted by an artist who chooses to remain unnamed. The facade of the Union Pacific bridge is comprised of panes of steel that separate the bridge into twenty-three rectangles. When the message first appeared on the bridge the letters were peacock blue, outlined in a pale, off-white mint green (Correa). Each blocky letter was painted into an individual corresponding rectangular pane, except for the M which stretched across two panes. Over the years, the message has gone through numerous phases. It has been altered and restored over nine times (Gonzales) as the artist has engaged in a battle with other

graffiti artists who want to either spread their own message or simply to vandalize his.


Artist Anonymous, the Be Someone bridge, 2017

The Be Someone bridge is easily the most viewed artwork in all of Houston. Though access to the bridge itself is difficult and maybe even dangerous, the lettering on its exterior façade is constantly engaged by Houston's unique community. Houston may be the fourth largest city in the United States, but it is most ethnically and racially diverse city in the country (Mejia). Its residents collectively speak over one hundred and forty-five different languages. Native Texans, people from across the United States and from all corners of the world converge in Houston. They are entrepreneurs, laborers, intellectuals, artists, and so much more, many of whom have overcome a myriad of challenges to be where they are. For all their differences, the vast majority of Houstonians share a common experience: passing beneath the Be Someone bridge.

The bridge demarcates passage from the greater Houston area into Downtown Houston. This is significant because while walls typically enforce rigid boundaries, the bridge stretches across a thoroughfare. The Be Someone bridge therefore serves as a symbolic gateway into the city.

As an artwork, the Be Someone must accommodate a perpetually dynamic audience. It is in a location constantly bombarded by movement. Unless there is a stoppage in the traffic ahead, the viewer engages the letters for only a moment. The highway is not a static place where one can dwell on an artwork. Instead, the artwork must rapidly deliver its message.

Jorge Casanova, Houston Skyline and the Be Someone Bridge.

The open-endedness of the message is part of its far-reaching resonance. Viewers may take the imperative at face value. "Be Someone" can be read as simple reminder to embrace your human existence, to enact your agency, to be present in the world and to make an impact, no matter how small. But viewer's may also be inclined to tailor the message to themselves, to fill out the unwritten part of a longer sentence. The viewer co-creates the message by filling in the blank: "Be Someone [who is kind / brave / hardworking / generous / intelligent / etc.]" or "Be Someone [who builds / loves / speaks up / makes money / makes friends / etc.]. The Houston Chronicle captures the message's efficiency and universal appeal. Though it consists of "two words, three syllables" it has "six million meanings."

On occasion, the bridge's message is changed to speak more directly to the historical moment. In March of 2020, the bridge's message was changed to "Wash ur Hands" to address the COVID-19 pandemic (Iconic Houston). In June of 2020, amidst nationwide protests against police brutality, the bridge invoked the name of George Floyd, an African American son of Houston who was murdered by a member of the Minneapolis police force (Name). The artist continuously persists in resurrecting his original message (Hayman). And while it may be a struggle to keep this Houston icon present and presentable, its frequently changing form serves a purpose. Unchanged, the Be Someone bridge would become a stagnant feature of the daily commute, melting into the background of the viewer's awareness. However, because the bridge changes often, the viewer's attention is frequently reenergized even if they have passed under it for eight years.

Houston-based artists often depict the Be Someone bridge in cityscape paintings. Their use of the mural's image on canvas is revealing of the different purposes the forms serve. The paintings are nostalgic, an homage to a hometown. They represent a city called to action by an iconic mural, but are not, in themselves, calls to action. At face value, this is a function of cityscape paintings as mimetic, but also reveals the constitutive difference between High Art and public murals. Paintings or sculptures can be moved around from gallery to gallery: they are not integral to the space where they are viewed. Murals are immovable, constitutive of the space where they are viewed, and so their significance is innately tied to the setting they help create. Murals are ingrained in their communities. They speak deeply and specifically to those communities. The appropriation of the same subject matter to High Art, to a painted canvas hung in a gallery loses much of the mural's significance.

It is not just the setting of a mural that speaks to its significance, but also the medium. Some mediums have connotations that inform the thematic elements of an artwork. For example, marble sculptures will invariably possess a certain loftiness that a wooden sculpture rarely does. Whether the subject matter is a biblical hero like David, or a utilitarian object like a vase, the fact that it is carved out of marble informs the aura of the work.

This dynamic is usefully illustrated by the work of renowned Argentinian artist Antonio Berni (1905-1981) who painted naturalistically but in a unique style. In his later years, walking through an Argentinian shantytown, he found himself drawn to the order implicit to the perceived chaos of homes constructed with cardboard, industrial scraps and garbage. He observed a resilient community that experienced joy and happiness even though it was coupled with pain and hardship. Berni wanted to create art that represented these resilient people. However, he realized that painting them in oils could not do them justice. For generations, oil paints had been used to depict kings, queens and the aristocracy. The medium was inseparably associated with wealth and extravagance. Using oils to depict the shantytown existence would be at odds with the intimate realities of its community. Instead, Berni depicted their lives in an assemblage of thrown away items, from cardboard to industrial scraps. Berni's mediums were the very things out of which people of the shantytown constructed their lives. The mediums meant that their portrayal spoke more directly to their experience than would have been the case had they been depicted in oil paint (Ramírez).

The Be Someone bridge and the People of The Community mural both utilize their setting in the same way that Berni employed the connotation of his materials. The Be Someone bridge's meaning is intimately tied to its specific setting and function. Not only does the transitory element of the high-

way inform the significance of the bridge, but the highway is also an equalizer. Metro Buses and Maseratis alike get stuck in traffic on Houston's highways. Regardless of income, gender, political preference, or education level, residents of Houston pass under the Be Someone bridge in the same manner. The significance of the mural lies in the fact that it is accessible and significant to every individual who passes under it: everyone can be someone. In a less trafficked space, especially in a private space, the message's broad appeal would be lost.

The significance of Ronen's piece also depends on its public, site-specificity. The Third Ward's socio-economic duress is evident on Holman Street, which runs adjacent to the People of The Community mural. The abandoned buildings and dirty Metro Stop of the mural's setting are essential to its significance: it provides a stark juxtaposition to the beaming faces of the murals subjects. During certain times of the day the children of Blackshear Elementary run out to recess. Their delighted shouts and laughter drifts over the wall, audible to the viewer looking up at delighted faces. The children, some of whom are portrayed on the mural, are the future of the Third Ward. They will be a part of its future, whether it continues to suffer through poverty, neglect, violence, and crime, or if, as hoped, it grows from strength to strength. Each of the faces on the wall represents a reality subject to both the dark risk and bright potential of living in the Third Ward. This deep resonance would be lost had Ronen chosen to depict the faces of the Third Ward's people in a different form and place.

In fact, at a recent exhibition at the Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts, Ronen showed six studies on cardboard of Third Ward residents who wanted to be included in the Blackshear mural project, but who could not because of space restrictions. Given their setting, the depictions of Third Ward residents held different connotations. Most immediately, the studies had less significance for their subjects. It is highly unlikely that they would travel all the way to Spring, Texas to see their faces portrayed. On Holman Street, however, mural subjects can walk by the People of The Community every day if they choose. While the museum setting "elevates" the studies to the level of High Art, it also renders them less accessible.

In addition, without the wall text alluding to the studies' relationship with the mural, the setting might have been more problematic. The portraits might still have shed light on the people of the Third Ward but, decontextualized in a gallery space, they would be objects for High Art patrons to view and judge. The result would be a one-way, top-down encounter. The site specificity of the mural is essential to its proper, fully democratized reception.

The social statements that these murals make are intrinsically tied to their materiality and locality. Through its materiality, the Be Someone bridge demonstrates that non-commissioned street art can be as culturally relevant as High Art in a privatized space, if not more so. Whereas privately owned High Art appeals to its owner, the bridge's appeal is indiscriminate. It asks everyone to consider their individual impact on the community around them. As public art the bridge offers both an introspective and extrospective view of the city of Houston. Similarly, Anat Ronen's People of The Community Mural delivers art to a community in dire need of it. Her art celebrates the individuality of the people of The Third Ward, thus empowering the community to conceive of themselves on their own terms, rather than in the quantitative language by which their community's problems are defined.

Ultimately, the Be Someone bridge and the People of the Community mural speak to each other, too. Just as the bridge is not perfectly polished, and is ever-evolving, so are the people of Houston. Every Houstonian can choose to be someone bright, good, generous, or kind, who makes a positive impact regardless of their own imperfections. The People of The Community mural reinforces this message. Its detailed portrayal of its subjects demonstrates their individuality, the humanity of people from vastly different walks of life, and how they converge in a community to make a difference. If the Be Someone bridge is a call to action, then the People of The Community heeds that call. Everyone on the mural, with their open faces and resilient smiles, is depicted being someone.

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# It is Melody in Shape: South Texas and Ángel Lartigue's *Burial Maps*

By Matthew Flores

As Mexicans and Latin Americans attempt to escape neo-liberal violence in their home countries, they arrive at the border wall, which becomes a site of habitation. Some stay a while in shantytowns and migrant camps erected on the Mexican side or suffer rampant poverty in colonias on the U.S. side. Some risk and die in the desert terrain avoiding border checkpoints on the Texas highways (Ura).

Of course, the borderlands are not meant to be a site of habitation. Ostensibly, it is a buffer that protects the American homeland. Inarguably, however, the U.S. policies and practices that govern the borderlands result in the deaths of migrants, and the reduction of migrant lives to perpetual transience and danger. According to art critic Chon Noriega, U.S. cruelty on the border suggests that the country conflates the idea of "home" with "possession" (24). Possession here refers not only to simple ownership, but the "homeowner's" invocation of the supernatural as defense against homeless outsiders.

Given that the borderlands are a haunted site of habitation for migrants, I want to explore ideas and practices that to whatever degree exorcise it, that claim the power to determine the significance of that space from those that regulate it. How, for example, can borderlands be reconceived so that it dignifies rather than abhors the migrant body? How, rather than just a site of habitation, can the borderland be reconceived as a home? Heidegger argues in "Building, Dwelling Thinking" that while a "home" or "dwelling" is a place that preserves us from harm and danger (351) it is also the space that accommodates our embodied presence and the rites and rituals by which we understand ourselves in relation to our world. The home's function is "to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals" (360). It is these rites and rituals, I will show, that the United States' "possession" of the borderlands disallows migrants.

I will therefore posit that mourning is not just as a passing rite but that it can be a conscious state of being is an act of resistance and resignification. Mourning, I will argue, is a future-oriented way of life, an anamnestic and intergenerational form of grace that humanely reconceives the bodies of migrants. For those who mourn, in turn, it is a ritual act of taking ownership, of living, of "staying with things" (Heidegger 352-3).

In this essay I will describe the present humanitarian crisis at the border against the backdrop of history of south Texas and, more broadly, the United States' narrative of cruelty along the border. Secondly, I examine the work of Teresa Margolles and Ángel Lartigue and their artistic representation of mourning. Margolles's installations and Lartigue's Forensic Burial Maps of Cadavers after Exhumation (Studies 1-5), I argue, enact a dignifying reanimation of the deaths of Mexican and Latin American migrants attempting to traverse this harsh landscape. Third, I will place Lartigue's Burial Maps (study #5) in conversation with a poem by J. Michael Martinez. Lastly, I will continue with analysis of the Burial Maps (study #5), while focusing on the melancholy aspects of the work through Walter Benjamin and José Esteban Muñoz.

I hope to engage fruitful enactments of mourning in this essay, but I do not intend to articulate any kind of unequivocal truths (especially from experiences so far removed from my own). This essay presents only fragments of thought that, together, gesture towards an aesthetic practice of mourning that seeks to challenge force-fed narratives of colonial trauma. As Walter Benjamin writes in The Origin of the German Trauerspiel, "The value of thought-fragments is all the more decisive the less they are immediately capable of measuring themselves by an underlying conception" (4) The humble thought-fragment is an iteration of "prosaic sobriety…the only manner of writin befitting philosophical inquiry."

**The First Fragment**

> LAND is symbolic of the way the body can be trapped by racialized existence. LAND exists in a perpetual state of longing, enclosure, and toil. (It should be noted that LAND's utterances do not find their way into this book.)
>
> \- Dawn Lundy Martin, Good Stock Strange Blood

The landscape of south Texas consists mostly of brush, or monta, made up of huisache, various cacti, and other hardy drought-resistant and bristle-laden plants. The 120-degree desert heat in the summer, and freezing conditions in winter, make the brush devastating terrain to trek. Upon arrival

to south Texas many migrants have already traveled over one-thousand miles from central and south America.

Since 2009, 642 migrant bodies discovered in Brooks county alone—the other three counties surrounding the highway checkpoints do not have public documentation of migrant deaths as of 2020 (Fernandez). This dire situation is the result of U.S. legislation meant to clamp down on migrants coming into the United States, funneling them into routes where border patrol and law enforcement recklessly disperse their groups, isolating them in perilous conditions. This is only the latest permutation of many forms of imposition from the United States on Mexican and Latin American bodies.

In Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States, Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo describes the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], as well as its more contemporary counterpart, the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement [USMCA] as the hoarding of industry. Through NAFTA, subsidies to farmers in Mexico were revoked and a chain reaction of impoverishment led many to abandon the countryside, to work in the urban maquila sector, or to attempt to cross into the United States. The resultant economic instability escalated the cartel drug wars in rural Mexico. The resultant violence is one of the main causes for migration into the United States (240). In keeping with the results of 19th century US statecraft, the economic violence of NAFTA and USMCA is directly complicit in cartel violence. And yet despite this complicity, cartel violence is perceived as proof of Mexican barbarity:

The figure of the indio bárbaro haunting the scenes of beheadings performs two functions at once. It naturalizes the violence for national audiences that insist on reading scalping and beheading as anachronistic acts of indigenous barbarity, necessarily foreign to the modern practice of statecraft. The indio bárbaro at the same time functions as a psychic derivative enabling citizens of both countries to repress their own liberal complicity in such practices. (236)

The "indio bárbaro" suggests that Mexicans and Latin Americans are anachronistic to and therefore incapable of living in the modern neo-liberal framework of the United States. It is worth noting that the U.S.'s perverse idea of the "home" is implicit to this conceit. Migrants are assumed to be incapable of attaining a specific capitalist idea of success: assimilation and possession. The United States does not conceive of itself as a home for migrants, a space of preservation, free from harm, danger, and respectful mourning.

The U.S. imagination's disregard for preservation is the corollary of its obsession with possession. To possess a home is not only to own it, but to perceive it as a site of haunting. This haunting derives from colonial perceptions

by which settlers took possession of, and thereby transcended, the wilderness in accordance with the teleology inherent to Manifest Destiny.

Article eleven of The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo deploys legalese to imbue the annexation of Mexican lands and their racial "geo-graphing" (Saldaña-Portillo 139) with "sacred" Christian obligation. Frederick Jackson Turner describes the wilderness as being improperly used by the natives, which to him, justified colonization by "waves of emotion, of a 'high religious voltage'—quick and direct in action" (Turner 106). Turner's thesis and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo both display statecraft that resorted to the language of spirituality in explaining the necessary appropriation of land. These "spiritual" underpinnings morally legitimated colonial excesses, such as bounty scalping and beheadings, as necessary forms of action decreed by Manifest Destiny.

It is worth noting that such violent acts were meant to intimidate those that witnessed them "beyond a desire for retaliation," to quell revenge and mourning into the "economy of death" (Saldaña-Portillo 129). This stifling of ritual mourning on the borderlands means that it is a geography haunted by a "Christian" moral ascendancy that uses cruelty as the absolute final word, that does not allow indigenous peoples rites by which to come to terms with trauma and death through effective mourning practices.

## The Second Fragment

> … sorrow, grief, mourning. As if all those are too familiar,
> too sepia, and almost decorative, blandly containing.
> – Denise Riley, Time Lived, Without its Flow

Though this violent history has roots one hundred and fifty years ago there is an uncanny parallel to contemporary violence on the borderlands of Mexico and south Texas. The rich artistic playfulness of Ángel Lartigue's Burial Maps (studies 1-5) and Teresa Margolles' work more broadly enact effective responses to such violence. Lartigue is a multidisciplinary artist from Houston who identifies as trans non-binary and whose work exhibits

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[2] "…affording the security and redress demanded by their true spirit and intent, the Government of the United States will now and hereafter pass, without unnecessary delay, and always vigilantly enforce, such laws as the nature of the subject may require. And, finally, the sacredness of this obligation shall never be lost sight of by the said Government, when providing for the removal of the Indians from any portion of the said territories, or for its being settled by citizens of the United States; but, on the contrary, special care shall then be taken not to place its Indian occupants under the necessity of seeking new homes, by

a contentedness with ambivalence, fluidity, and engagement with artistic praxis outside of their work. They also describe their non-binary identity as "the rolling dice of their art" (Forensic Artist). Their Forensic Burial Maps of Cadavers after Exhumation (Studies 1-5) combines the artist's knowledge of forensics and conceptual art into a transhistoric portrayal of decomposing cadavers mapped onto sheets of graph paper. Through their volunteer work exhuming the mass graves at Sacred Heart cemetery in Falfurrias, Texas, and their research in a Texas university forensics program, they have transposed original life-size cadaver maps used in forensic study and archival onto smaller, proportionately scaled down versions. According to the artist, their idea for the Burial Maps (studies 1-5) did not occur until much later after the forensic exhumation fieldwork (Flores). Lartigue's work exhibits a gracious reimagining of exhumed migrant remains, which is evident when placing it in conversation with the work of Mexican forensic artist Teresa Margolles.

Margolles grew up in the narco city of Culiacán, origin to the Sinaloa drug cartel in the 1990's. Her artistic practice involved using materials from the morgue in Mexico City where she worked at the time. This led to some calling her work, "necrophiliac aesthetics," inferring a shock value by displaying death outside of its normal context within morgues or cemeteries (Gallo 119). This shock was most notably apparent within institutional art gallery spaces. In her 53rd Venice Biennale installation, "¿De qué otra cosa podemos hablar? (What else could we talk about?)" the floors of her performance site were mopped with rehydrated blood and dirt from scenes of cartel assassinations in Mexico.

Margolles's work is heavily influenced by Hermann Nitsch and the Viennese-Actionist movement of the 1960s (Copeland). Nitsch's extreme performances involving blood, sex, and masochism hold close to the belief in a sacred form of catharsis as transcendence; an outlet that can supposedly relieve our "natural" violent urges as a society. Maggie Nelson writes that Nitsch's perspective on Aristotelian catharsis is a "strategic form of alienation that would provoke the audience into dialectical thinking, decision-making, a desire for further knowledge, and action" (Nelson 24). Margolles work draws on Nitsch but is strongly influenced by forensics.

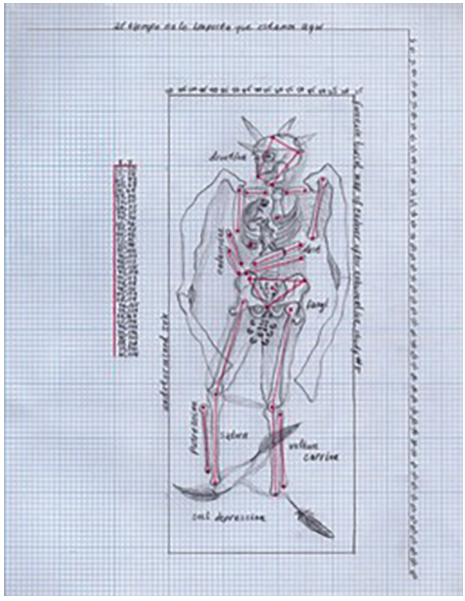
In a 2009 interview Margolles claimed that while she used to have to steal materials from a morgue, now anyone can readily find death in the streets of Mexico (Conversations). Her words and work are compelling in the south Texas, with the increased accessibility of dead bodies in the borderlands. In 2012 alone the sheriff's office in Brooks county, where Sacred Heart cemetery in Falfurrias is located, recovered 129 bodies (del Bosque). Lartigue's drawings are in discourse with death in the ranch brushland of Brooks county, and

Margolles' art is a critique of how death is so readily on display in the cartel terrain of Mexico (Salazar 95).

I am less interested in which artist's work is more aesthetically appealing, or more socially acceptable, than I am in what artistic practice can accomplish with regard to public awareness. There are bigger questions of Lartigue's and Margolles's art in relation to their witnessing and crafting artwork around the subject of violence. In this regard, their work invokes more than shallow discomfort or shock. Margolles and Lartigue do not display dead bodies in their installations and drawings, and "this reduction in spectacularisation of the corpse also reduces the risk of the commodification of death…" (Banwell 64). However, they also refuse to shy away from the visibility of the dead. When, artistically crafted images of death and violence in the borderlands slip through the U.S. administration's veiling attempts, it requires a renegotiation of what it means to witness. Their forensic art, for example, challenges the judicial narratives by which bodies are reduced to mere "evidence," recontextualizing them to prompt reflection beyond questions of guilt, innocence and justice. Lartigue's and Margolles' work, in other words, form part of nuanced practices that consider the ethical implications of appropriation and assimilation of the dead towards artistic ends.

**The Third Fragment**

Poetry is corporeal: the reverse of names
– Octavio Paz, The Monkey Grammarian



Ángel Lartigue's Burial Maps (study #5) calls to mind the names of the dead so that they may be reclaimed from institutional modes of archiving that render them anonymous. These archival modes do not account for the liminal and transient afterlife in which, so faith might have it, the dead hold on to a form of sentience. As Denise Riley writes, "It's as if any death causes the collapse of the simplest referring language. As if the grammatical subject of the sentence and the human subject have been felled together by the one blow. Yet at the same time, the continuing possibilities for discussing the no longer existing person induce a curious linguistic quasi-resurrection" (55).

Lartigue's work invokes a representational "quasi-resurrection" through the strangeness of the cadaver's skeleton and the text surrounding it. The cadaver is redrawn from life sized maps of human remains onto the much smaller 8.5x11 vellum graph papers. There is not only human anatomy diagrammed here but anamorphic parts, foliage, traces of carrion, text in English and Spanish, as well as physical and spiritual re-imaginings of the body after death. At left of the Burial Maps is numerical notation displaying coordinates of the found remains according to forensic practice. Lartigue states that this is to bring awareness to the constellation of body and land in relation to each other (Flores).

Wings take the place of arms and a crown of spikes protrudes from the skull. In this regard Lartigue's representation of death differs dramatically from that of Margolles, which relies on a readymade political aesthetic (Salazar 93). Lartigue's endeavor is not to display the dead as part of a political, institutional, or social critique, but to envision a rich and sentient afterlife through the body's decay.

Vulture feathers loom below the fibula bones where faint lines in pencil are drawn to connect the three large feathers to each other and the skeleton. The feathers are an ethereal tying of a human cadaver to decay and carrion (the actual text "vulture carrion," is clearly shown to the right of the fibula). The ghostly pencil lines continue to spread outward from fibula to femur, then to engulf the pelvis like a visible electric field.

Here, the ilium wings are graphed by a red triangle with pubis apex. Many piercings obscure where one would look for traces of a sex. To the left of the cadaver "undetermined sex" is written. Lartigue's non-binary identity is relevant here in that their perspective has an acute capacity to challenge restrictive social norms. They are especially concerned with narrow archival methods in forensic practice which sees gender binaries as necessary for the identification of bodily remains so that they can be returned to loved ones. Even after death, Lartigue seems to suggest, migrants have personal autonomy denied by the colonizer's cis-heteronormative perspective.

Lartigue's Burial Map suggests a resistant archival mode that can accommodate the play between death and afterlife. Their drawings suggest that a liminal sentience is sustained in the process of biological decay and fragmentation. The text above the skeleton, "al tiempo no la importa que estamos aquí" ("at the time it did not matter we were here") calls to mind what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the "nepantla body," sensitive to a world outside constructs of space, time, and society (34).

**The Fourth Fragment**

fig. 201

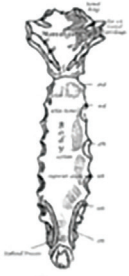


fig. 202

fig. 203

Her *Thorax* or *Chest* (fig. 201), an osseo-cartilaginous garden, contains the principal contemplations of the turquoise serpent, causality's unlimited sway. It is melody in shape, being a hymn of praise above and of marigold below.

Martinez, J. Michael. "The Sternum of Our Lady of Guadalupe" from *Heredities* (47)

Lartigue's Burial Maps (#5) is also reminiscent of J. Michael Martinez's poem "The Sternum of Our Lady of Guadalupe" from Heredities. With tender didacticism, Martinez reimagines ink drawings from Gray's Anatomy with references to Aztec mythology. Martinez's poem might best be described as a series of "thought-fragments," similar to the text that surrounds Lartigue's mapped cadaver, but with a greater emphasis on sound.

The poem's interest in the divine is not rendered through iambs, which would invoke the "optimistic normalcy" of the western poetic tradition (Fussell 37). Instead, the poem is marked by heavy use of consonance and spondees, starting mid-way through the first line and continuing throughout. Martinez's poesis appropriates the ascendant tone of western spiritual transcendence and transforms it from melancholic weariness into musical activity (37).

Walter Benjamin would also call this sonic emphasis "primal hearing" through the prioritization of sound to disfigure the heightened tone of sci-

entific rhetoric with profane symbolism (Benjamin 13). Martinez thus disrupts the epistemological ascendancy of western scientific knowledge tied to the cadaver in the Gray's Anatomy original drawings and makes room for the presence of the divine. This approach to language also gestures towards Heidegger's criterion for the worthiness of a dwelling: it must allow for the preservation of the divine.

An epigraph at the beginning of Martinez's poem is taken from the Nahuatl text, Huei tlamahuiçoltica, as rendered by the sixteenth century colonial Mexican scholar Antonio Valeriano. The text describes the apparitions of the Virgin de Guadalupe to Juan Diego at the hill on Tepeyac. She says, "…in my Teocalli, I will listen to their cry, to their sadness, so as to curb all their different pains, their miseries and sorrows, to remedy and alleviate their sufferings…" (qtd. in Martinez 47). "Teocalli" translates to "God-house" or temple, and the care expressed by the Virgin de Guadalupe towards Juan Diego in Valeriano's text invokes the reciprocal preservation necessary for good dwelling.

The divine here adumbrates the cold anonymity of the archived bones. Lartigue artistically infuses the visual archive of a cadaver's arrangement with significance that transcends their physical death at the hands of colonial cruelties. Martinez sonically disrupts the cold objectification of the cadaver and in doing so makes room for the divine.

**The Fifth Fragment**

> …melancholia, for blacks, queers, or any queers of color, is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives…Rather, it is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names.
>
> – José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications

In both artist and poet, their work has a distinct undercurrent of melancholia. Martinez's reorients the reader to the oppressive analytic distance of Gray's Anatomy's scientific drawings, and Lartigue's Burial Maps (study #5), graphs an actual cadaver and its locations, the coordinates written off to the

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[3] "The being—distant from all phenomenality—in which alone this power inheres is that of the name. It is this being that determines the givenness of ideas. They are given, however, not so much in a primal language as in a primal hearing, in which words possess the nobility of their naming power undiminished by the signification necessary to knowledge" (Benjamin 13).

side. However, my interest is in the text around the cadaver: "vulture carrion," "soil depression," "dust," "putrescence," and most notably, "Saturn."

Walter Benjamin draws on philosopher Marsilio Ficino, painter Albrecht Dürer, and Shakespeare's Hamlet (to cite only a few) in suggesting that Saturn is the astrological symbol for melancholic disposition. According to Benjamin, during the Renaissance philosophers like Ficino interpreted Saturnalian melancholy as an indication of rich intellect gleaned from "occult insight" (Benjamin 155). This definition of genius suggests its close relationship with and awareness of bodily death. Occult insights were dangerous and required "supplementing a precise dietetic of body and soul [with] astrological magic," to prevent an overload of grief from turning into madness (Benjamin 155).

How does this pertain to the word "Saturn," written between the legs of the migrant's remains in Lartigue's Burial Maps (study #5)? The planet's position is in close proximity to the area of the human body that, according to scientific practice, denotes sex (note, also, that a little further down, beneath the carrion feathers, the words "soil depression" appear). The cadaver's non-binary definition is strategically situated close to the planetary symbol for occult insight and melancholy. Lartigue's own non-binary identity allows them the capacity for working within a perspective of ambivalence that does not limit itself to gender orientation. It flows throughout their artistic practice and praxis in waves of ambiguity affected by this land's melancholy history.

If U.S. policies and practices dictate that black and brown bodies be left unmourned, Lartigue's drawings invoke a melancholy that is not just a psychological rite, but a complex depressive state of "obsessive reparation" (Muñoz 683). Lartigue's idea of mourning steps beyond the Freudian pathology that posits mourning as a means to the end of "completion," (Muñoz 683). This depressive melancholy position is characterized by repeated attempts at mourning in the hope for a sense of belonging, but also as a reparative performance, "to not simply cleanse negativity but instead to promote the desire that the subject has in the wake of the negative to reconstruct a relational field" (Muñoz 683).

Migrants are portrayed as being excised from a still wild landscape in Lartigue's work, but by positing the rich history of melancholy through inclusion of the text "Saturn" in their drawing they imagine alternative futures. Anamorphic appendages convey this futurism as well as the migrant's voice through the text "al tiempo no le importa que estamos aquí," and queerness is also showing this through the bodily decomposition of gender in "undetermined sex." Lartigue reveals how the body "never fully disappears; instead it haunts the present…something whose mourning is a condition of possibility…" (Muñoz 683).

That migrant deaths are not more visible to the public implies a belated and uncanny inferiority in their plight against the landscape of neoliberal capitalism. The south Texas terrain stolen by U.S. and Texian settlers is therefore understood as still being possessed by its original wild telos, haunted, as expressed through Turner's essay . The repetitious trauma enacted upon migrants trying to enter the U.S. and facilitated by the current U.S. administration incites an obsessive kind of mourning. It is the inability to respectfully account for the remains and afterlife of the dead. Nonetheless, José Esteban Muñoz describes this repetitive affective position as the "ways in which subjects occupy and dwell within the depressive position" (Muñoz 684). Thus, a dwelling can be made even in this melancholic relation to land.

Lartigue's Burial Maps (study #5) shines a light on the mosaic of melancholy that glimmers through a lens of hopeful, regenerative, and complex artistic craft. It enacts what Benjamin referred to as the "allegory of resurrection" (Pensky 131). Lartigue's invocations of saturnine melancholy represent the kind of comfort with ambiguity required to dwell in the borderlands.

**The Sixth Fragment**

Above, Coyolxauhqui's luz pulls you from the pit of your grief.
– Gloria Anzaldúa, Light in the Dark /Luz en lo Oscuro

The intent of Lartigue's work and my account of it is not to "plastinate" deceased migrants, to admire them for the dead-ness, as Gunther Von Hagans does in his "Bodyworlds" exhibits (Capello 84). The migrant dead should be seen as human beings with personal histories, friendships, dreams, ambitions, and rich family relations. To mourn them is to see them in just this way.

These fragments gesture towards mourning as active praxis, one that allows the mourner to create, lay claim to, and stay with things – the Heideggerian distillation of living. Benjamin would call such mourning the "precise dietetic for body and soul" (155) and Anzaldúa would refer to it as "conocimiento," propelling us forward into spiritual activism (40). To mourn on the borderlands just as our ancestors did  before it was stolen from them is to reclaim it, to be present again, it is to demand acknowledgement and responsibility for safeguarding and preserving all persons who dwell there.

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[4] "The wilderness masters the colonist…he takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion…little by little he transforms the wilderness" (Turner 4).

Being present can take form in many ways, for Lartigue this is evident through their art and time voluntarily forensically recovering remains in Falfurrias. I hesitate to express how I have dwelled against the grain of all the United States' cruel policies against black and brown bodies in the borderlands. It does not feel like it amounts to much in the vast expanse of that landscape.

I once helped fill empty drum barrels at water stations along South Texas Highways. I accompanied the director of the South Texas Human Rights Center. Later in the evening he received a call. It was a woman asking what she could do, where she could go, to find her missing uncle who should have been escorted through the brush by coyotes weeks ago. The director replied in the present tense, he's probably still out there – as if her uncle had simply decided to shift course, headed east over the sand dunes, walked out into the dark abundance of the Gulf's saline waves. In my mind, he dragged thistles torn underfoot the whole distance. Arriving under moonglow with loosened tufts of flowers, he entered the waves. It sounded like every key on a piano softly forearmed down.

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[5] "El chamanismo es una alianza entre los humanos y 'los dioses' — La chamana explica, alivia, y previene las desgracias. A system of healing based on spiritual practices, chamanería has survived for more than forty thousand years" (Anzaldúa 32). I consider the craft Lartigue engages in not simply as aesthetic skill-set, but as conjuring in the archaic sense of this word.

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# Nietzsche on Inpsychation and Forgetfulness

By Marco Garcia

In "Honesty and Curiosity in Nietzsche's Free Spirits," Bernard Reginster argues that Friedrich Nietzsche's "free spirits" possess an open curiosity towards the world. In "Experimentation, Curiosity, and Forgetting" Rebecca Bamford argues that Nietzsche's free spirits are curious and experimental, both of which, she adds, are compatible with forgetfulness. However, Reginster and Bamford offer no explanation as to how the free spirit can be simultaneously curious, experimental, and forgetful. Even more problematic is their failure to consider the free spirit and "the philosopher of the future" in light of Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, which, in Beyond Good and Evil [BGE] he says is "life itself" ( 21).

Nietzsche refers to the will to power throughout his texts, but it is only in The Genealogy of Morals [GM] that he gives a name to the way humans enact their will to power: Inpsychation. Inpsychation refers to the idea that humans digest experiences like they digest food. Understanding inpsychation is key to explaining how the free spirit can be curious, experimental, and forgetful and how the philosopher of the future sifts through information and focuses their attention.

This article consists of three parts. In the first, I build on Reginster and Bamford's arguments by explaining the relationship between curiosity and forgetfulness. In the second part, I show how free spirits use forgetfulness to digest various experiences. In the last part, I show how Nietzsche's philosopher of the future uses forgetfulness to select what to focus on and to create new values.

## I.
## Free Spirits, Curiosity, and the Problem of Forgetfulness

One of the most interesting contributions Reginster makes is the distinction between the free spirit and "the fanatical truth seeker." This distinction is not easy, he writes, "since both are arguably animated by a passion for knowledge" (456). He argues that while free spirits are attracted to uncertainty and ignorance, the fanatical truth seeker is averse to them. He argues that Nietzsche refers to the free spirit's passion for truth as "intellectual curiosity" (459). The free spirit's intellectual curiosity is unique, Reginster continues, in that it can be upset by a shortage of problems. Resolutions, insofar as they reduce the number of problems, can therefore also upset the intellectually curious free spirit.

Reginster then considers the notion that curiosity is a source of intellectual dissoluteness. Augustine, he writes, believed it distracts the mind. Aquinas believed curiosity causes the mind to wander aimlessly, sometimes leading it to unlawful things. For these reasons, both maintain that curiosity is a vice. Reginster argues that Nietzsche only partly agrees with them. For Nietzsche, curiosity can lead to intellectual dissoluteness, but he "rejects their judgement that curiosity is a vice" (460).

According to Reginster, the free spirits' tendency for intellectual dissoluteness distinguishes them from the philosopher of the future. Free spirits' intellectual curiosity allows them to obtain various points of view, but the philosopher of the future has "the ability to achieve unity out of a multiplicity" (460). Reginster therefore concludes that curiosity is insufficient to attain what Nietzsche considers to be greatness. To be great, according the Reginster, the free spirit must have the courage to seek forbidden knowledge: "This 'courage for the forbidden,' [Nietzsche] suggests, is what compels the curiosity of the 'great' mind to focus" (461). Reginster maintains that Nietzsche gives no psychological explanation as to why resistance might entice the free spirit to focus and become great.

Reginster's claim regarding the free spirit's pathway to greatness is supported by Nietzsche's later writings, notably by Beyond Good and Evil. One of the traits Nietzsche assigns true free spirits is the strength to digest any sort of experience. Free spirits, he writes, are:

> [C]urious to a vice, investigators to the point of cruelty, with uninhibited fingers for the unfathomable, with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible, ready for every venture, thanks to an excess of "free will," with fore- and back-souls into whose ultimate intentions nobody can look so easily, with fore - and back-

grounds which no foot is likely to explore to the end. (55)

True free spirits can digest indigestible things and, as Nietzsche's description suggests, they revel in this capacity. However, their curiosity is excessive, to the point of vice (which is not to say that curiosity is a vice in itself). Their investigations have a threshold that, if reached, turns their curiosity into self-directed cruelty. This happens when they encounter difficult or seemingly indigestible things. Free spirits perpetrate cruelty against themselves because doing so, according to Nietzsche, is a constitutive function of life. Earlier in Beyond Good and Evil, he writes: "Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength—life itself is will to power; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent results" (21). Intellectual curiosity, which frequently encounters and is enticed by what is forbidden, exhibits a will to power. Before we can understand how this is so, it is important to consider what Nietzsche finds detestable about curiosity. Doing so will allow us to unearth Nietzsche's fascination with physio-psychology.

Although Nietzsche defends curiosity there is evidence to suggest that he does not believe it to be appropriate in all circumstances. For example, in Beyond Good and Evil, he takes issue with "historical sense": the ability to view history through the perspective of those who lived it (151). For Nietzsche, historical sense is a uniquely modern phenomenon because modern society alone has yielded the possibility of trying on previous cultures. He considers this practice to be "plebeian" and thoroughly "ignoble" (150-51). He disdains what he refers to as the "incontinence" of the "so-called educated class," when it comes to cultural experience (214). As Nietzsche puts it, "they touch, lick, and finger everything" (213). And while he suggests that the continence or restraint shown by common people is preferable, he lists incontinence as characteristic of the plebeian or commoner (214). Unrestrained historical sense, he thereby suggests, lowers the educated elite to the ranks of mediocrity.

Yet, historical sense, because it attains various points of view seems to be an enactment of curiosity. If curiosity is a virtue of the free spirit, how do we deal with the fact that Nietzsche also finds (and disdains) it among average people? Perhaps Nietzsche wants us to distinguish between two types of curiosity, one for average folk and another for free spirits. What we can surmise is that unrestrained curiosity can be misdi-

rected and that it can lead free spirits astray from investigations that are truly important. Historical sense is an example of misdirected curiosity.

Notably, Nietzsche's language repeatedly suggests that he conceives of curiosity not just as a psychological predisposition but also as physiological desire or hunger. Curiosity, in this sense, is how free spirits sate or nourish themselves. In this regard restraint or abstemiousness is important. While there is no rule for how much a spirit needs to nourish itself, there is a rule for free spirits. Nietzsche links the freedom of spirits with a kind of discipline and emptiness, whereas being unfree is linked with gluttony and fullness. In The Gay Science [GS] Nietzsche writes:

> We have different needs, grow differently, and also have a different digestion: we need more, we also need less. How much a spirit needs for its nourishment, for this there is no formula; but if its taste is for independence, for quick coming and going, for roaming, perhaps for adventures for which only the swiftest are a match, it is better for such a spirit to live in freedom with little to eat than unfree and stuffed. It is not fat but the greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer desires from his nourishment – and I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his "service of God." (345)

The importance of "lightness" to Nietzsche's thinking is demonstrated in his allegory of the town. The town, for Nietzsche, represents one's milieu (one's settled, stable worldview: in this regard, conventional European Manichean morality) and the wilderness and mountains represent freedom. Nietzsche says that if one wants to get a better, more holistic view of the town, one must leave it (342). This enables one to see how the town functions, to see how seemingly unrelated things connect. However, to leave the town, one must first be light:

> If one would like to see our European morality for once as it looks from a distance, and if one would like to measure it against other moralities, past and future, then one has to proceed like a wanderer who wants to know how high the towers in a town are: he leaves the town. "Thoughts about moral prejudices," if they are not meant to be prejudices, presuppose a position outside morality, some point beyond good and evil to which one has to rise, climb, or fly. (342)

Only certain types, however, can make the trip. One may want to get out of the town, but Nietzsche doubts all have the capacity to do so. This question depends on several factors; lightness, however, stands above the rest. Nietzsche writes: