WATCHUNG REVIEW

DISMANTLING INEQUALITY
through DIALOGUES OF CONSCIENCE

DISMANTLING INEQUALITY
THROUGH DIALOGUES OF CONSCIENCE

Nathaniel Hagemaster

"EATING UP" THE MARGINS OF SUBVERSIVE PERFORMANCE

EXAMINING THE MARGINALIZATION OF FAT DRAG QUEENS ON *RuPaul's Drag Race*

When *RuPaul's Drag Race (RPDR)* season three contestant Delta Work, inspired by Delta Burke, discusses how her lack of confidence from being overweight prevents her from going out to gay bars when she isn't in drag, she describes how her friends attempt to build her confidence by inviting her to "Chubby Night" at one of these bars. This invitation to an event that deems people with more robust figures as sexually alternative prompts Work to reply, "No, I don't want to go to freak show night."

As Work insinuates, fatness is typically cast as a decidedly unattractive foil to conventionally attractive qualities that have been set for people's bodies—thinness and musculature. Given society's emphasis on lauding the thin and denigrating the fat, it should not come as a surprise that big girls on *RPDR* typically portray drag characters who make it apparent that they know they're fat. After all, how dare they pretend to have acquired the thin status when their bodies betray the fact that they have not. On the "Snatch Game," a parody of the *Match Game*, big girl contestants typically choose to impersonate celebrities who are likewise overweight such as Mo'Nique, Aretha Franklin, Adele, Snooki, and Paula Deen. They are often shown eating, with a few even complaining about running out of food or cleverly making quips about why they are eating at an inappropriate time. In fact, what led to Work's remark about being invited to "freak show night" was her expressed bitterness from her low evaluation for impersonating Cher on the "Snatch Game," while big girl Stacy Lane Mathews was praised for playing Mo'Nique while eating and referencing *Precious* (2009).

Part of drag's subversive appeal is rooted in the idea that drag queens flaunt a lack of heteronormative control by transgressing standards that have been set for how men ought to dress, an extremely intimate act that many can't control for others. The flaunting of fat bodies by big girls adds another layer to that lack of normative control because it not only transgresses gendered standards, but bodily standards as well by showing an acceptance of fatness and presenting a fat, feminine body in ways that differ from fat women's normative presentations of their bodies. Further, this transgressive flaunting of fatness disregards the normalized desire to lose or hide fatness, as most rhetoric about fatness implies, and instead advocates fat representation as something that doesn't need to be controlled.

Thus, performing fatness in drag, it can be argued, reclaims the fat effeminate body by flaunting a body type that is often rejected, thereby giving agency to the big girl. As José Esteban Muñoz theorizes, disidentification addresses how people who are part of the majority population, namely white heterosexuals, have so many options for figures in popular culture to identify with, they can easily access or avoid cultural labels to identify with, while minorities typically have to rely on co-cultural discourses to locate identities for themselves (5). Specifically, Muñoz argues that drag queens disidentify "with not only the ideal of woman but the a priori relationship of woman and femininity that is a tenet of gender-normative thinking" because a drag version of "woman" is not a direct articulation or imitation of what 'female' actually is, but more of an allusion to what is typically thought of as 'woman' (108). Therefore, big girls disidentify with standard drag by relying on the limited tropes for fat women that have been set by popular culture, while rejecting the assumption that fatness is a limitation or undesirable. Since the work that goes into most drag aesthetics present a heightened form of woman, perhaps fat drag queens present a heightened form of fat woman that embraces her larger physique instead of trying to tame it.

However, this disidentification sets a standard that limits acceptable ways for how big girls ought to perform on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. For example, in the first episode of *RPDR*'s second season, Mystique Summers Madison introduces herself to the other contestants by caressing each of her breasts and large belly one at a time and saying, "Cheeseburger, Taco Bell, and a Diet Coke on the side." Mystique also became known for the catchphrase that she is going to get a "two piece (of fried chicken) and a biscuit," which was heavily referenced in future seasons of the show. Her reference to her body being more robust than her fellow contestants' not only addresses fat stereotypes that all heavier people eat fast food, but also the stereotype that African American people love fried chicken, which subversively highlights Mystique's intersection of being both fat and Black. However, even though Mystique's catchphrase is well-remembered, showing how big girls are often encouraged to perform their bodies in a particular way, the fact that she was eliminated so early in her season indicates how performing fatness is not as valued as other kinds of drag.

Although these queens' performances are effective for survival on *RPDR*, enacting characteristics of fatness merely based on how their bodies look pigeon-holes them and other big girls into one kind of performance. This narrow margin for big girls makes any deviations from fat performance unsuccessful on the competition reality show and makes these queens' fatness the primary target of scrutiny in the show's "reading" mini-challenges, where the contestants are invited to playfully insult each other in front of the rest of the cast. For example, in the third season's reading challenge, Shangela's featured read of Delta Work was to call her Mimi Imfurst. What gave this read its sting was the fact that Mimi was a campy contestant who Shangela had an infamous altercation with over how she and other contestants believed that Mimi's look was unrefined. Since Delta's aesthetic hasn't been up for scrutiny, the only quality that Delta and Mimi shared was the fact that they were both big girls. Therefore, the idea that big girls have to perform their nonnormative bodies to be successful on *RPDR* emphasizes a narrow margin that is set for fat drag performers. So, to effectively examine the various intersections that are involved with fat drag, big girls will be situated in a third space between how masculinity and femininity relate to fatness. Then to contextualize the rhetorical nature of how fatness is performed by big girls, ideologies about fatness and fat character tropes in popular culture will be addressed.

Fitting in the Third Space of Fat Masculinity and Fat Femininity: Locating "Big Girls" Between Fat Women and Fat Gay Men

Considering the connotations of what fatness represents in terms of masculinity and femininity, big girls occupy a third space in between fat gay men and fat women because even though most big girls are fat gay men, their drag aesthetics typically resemble and allude to fat women. This line between fat masculinity and fat femininity that big girls straddle appears to emphasize how fatness is more complicated than merely being masculine or feminine because, depending on its context, fatness can be masculine and feminine. Since arguably anyone is capable of getting fat and certain levels of obesity on a man or a woman can appear generally the same, the fat body frame is almost genderless. Thus, by sticking what are known as "man boobs" into a bra and shaping a robust mid-section with a corset and hip pads, big girls are able to highlight how their fat male bodies that could be masculinized when they are out of drag, can also add to their femininity in drag.

As Homi K. Bhabha theorizes, Third Space involves an understanding "that all cultural statements and systems [in the first and second spaces] are constructed" to be "contradictory and ambivalent" from one another (55), while cultures and people are actually fluid, rather than fixed. For example, common assumptions about gender are that male and female are fixed and definite categories of identity that exist in opposition with one another, while drag queens and trans individuals emphasize that gender is more fluid and gendered bodies are malleable. Thus, similar to how drag challenges the tradition that frames male and female in opposition to each other because it occupies a space between gendered polarities, big girls occupy a space in between masculine and feminine perceptions of fatness. Furthermore, big girls' embodiments of both fat-feminine and fat-masculine identities seem about as culturally incongruent as what has become normative gendered connotations of fatness because while it is feminized in some contexts, it is considered masculine in other contexts.

Since the fashion industry typically caters to thin women and emphasizes attributes like small waistlines as signs of femininity, women who do not fit the fashionable norm are often subjected to dressing plainer and covering their bodies. They are thus both defeminized and shamed. However, until fat gay men began reclaiming fatness as desirably rugged by attributing largeness with masculinity in bear culture, male fatness was typically feminized and shamed. For example, a heavy-set man's breasts "man boobs" and large bellies likened to pregnant women's. Jokes are also made that a fat man can't see or reach his penis, which not only targets issues of weight, but emphasizes apparent failures in masculinity. These connotations also translate into male aging, not only in terms of impotence and erectile dysfunction, but the older man's lack of testosterone, which decreases men's ability to gain muscle and increases his body fat, as well as a reduced sex drive – all things that are attributed to femininity and women's bodies. Although, the queering of normative fatness in the gay male community appears to subvert the incongruous gendered connotations of male fatness because, as largeness is often used to defeminize women, fat gay men trouble the normative concept that largeness equals masculine—in terms of tallness, broadness, muscle mass, etc.—by applying it to fatness as well. However, since big girls perform femininity, the gay male reclamation of fatness as masculine does not apply to them in the same way, which is why it is necessary to assess where fat drag queens fall between fat gay men and fat women.

Regardless of gendered associations with obesity, fatness is typically framed as something that can and needs to be fixed, which implies that everybody who is considered fat is doing something wrong for their bodies to appear that way. Thus, being fat indicates a lack of bodily, as well as normative, control. In Michel Foucault's discussion of how bodies

are docile, in reference to his description of bodies that communicate "soldier" to citizens, he appears to frame the fat body as a foil to "the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces" (136). Foucault contends that "in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations" (136) with the example of a soldier's body—with his upright posture, pristine uniform, and powerful build—being an ultimate result of a body that is disciplined, weaponized, and made into government property. This sense of the soldier's body as government property even goes as far as considering excessive weight gain as 'damage' to government property. Thus, even though the complicated nature of obesity can be viewed as docile and controlled to some extent—as a result of the excessive consumption of fast food and less physically active entertainment—the body that resembles a soldier's symbolizes a controlled, therefore normative body, while the fat body appears to symbolize a lack of control or discipline.

In their discussion about anti-fat rhetoric in advertisements for beauty, dietary, and fitness products, Samantha Kwan and Jennifer Graves address how these ads often disregard the many complex causes for obesity and articulate essentialist implications that everybody can and should fight their fatness to acquire a physique that fits normative standards of attractiveness. These authors claim that the vast majority of these advertisers ignore aspects of ability, genetic predispositions, and even legitimate health that may not appear aesthetically appealing, and "propose various solutions to fight fat" by implying "that the body is malleable and within an individual's control" (Kwan and Graves 28). Kwan and Graves further state that fat individuals are always blameworthy for their appearance "whether it is the failure to practice self-restraint or to invest time, energy, or money in oneself" (28-29). Regardless of the potential genetic advantages and/or cosmetic surgeries that might help people achieve normative physiques, since the much desired "taut body" is presumably "the result of endless hours at the gym and dietary restrictions," it is considered "a reflection of moral fortitude, perseverance, and bodily mastery" (Kwan and Graves 28-29). Thus, when fatness is demonized from a Judeo-Christian moralistic standpoint, even though the bible does not explicitly demean fatness, three out of seven of the deadly sins—gluttony, greed, and sloth—contain traits that are typically attributed to fat people because they are often assumed to eat a lot, retain what they have (both physically and mentally), and be lazy. Therefore, it is considered normal to assume that people who are not normatively fit cannot control their bodies, unlike those who appear to be in shape, and they are being punished with obesity for losing this control, as well as breaking moral standards that have been set. In this sense, part of drag's subversive appeal is rooted in the idea that drag queens flaunt a lack of heteronormative control by transgressing standards that have been set for how men ought to dress, an extremely intimate act that many cannot control for others. So, big girls' flaunting of fat bodies appears to add another layer to that lack of normative control because it not only transgresses gendered standards, but bodily standards as well by showing an acceptance of fatness and presenting a fat, feminine body in ways that differ from fat women's normative presentations of their bodies. Further, this transgressive flaunting of fatness disregards the normalized desire to lose or hide fatness, as most rhetoric about fatness implies, and instead advocates fat representation as something that does not need to be controlled.

The assumption that fatness is a mark of deficient moral character and lack of self-control appears to have gendered associations because general standards for physical beauty are held to higher standards for women and, similar to the essentialist idea that everybody can avoid and/or prevent obesity, it is assumed that anyone can be physically beautiful if they try hard enough, which justifies the mistreatment of unattractive people, especially unattractive women. Therefore, by keeping obese people self-conscious and preventing them from thinking that it is acceptable to look the way they do, seems to be a way of controlling their nonnormative bodies because the acceptance and flaunting of fat bodies means that there is an acceptance of a deficient moral character, as well as there being no need for fat people to beat themselves up over attempting to change their bodies. In April Herndon's discussion about the need for fat studies to merge with feminist and disability activism, she explains that like age and disability, most people are capable of gaining weight, which emphasizes an intrinsic fear of obesities' contagious disease-like nature, thus making fatness something to be pathologized. Herndon claims that "fat tests the boundaries between individual desires for certain embodiments and larger feminist goals of resisting corporeal ultimatums precisely because so many women and/or feminists struggle with their own physical identities" (131-32). She further states that unlike the normative expectation that anybody can be fit and physically attractive, "the notion of fatness as fluid is dangerous and threatening because it serves as a reminder that our bodies are dynamic rather than fixed" (Herndon 132), which resembles a drag ideology that anybody can essentially be a blank canvas for makeup, wigs, and clothing. Herndon also addresses how, similar to ableism, fatphobia is extremely pervasive since "the boundaries of who is fat and who is not are recognized as contextual," so the power of derogatorily being called "fat" "is lodged in the fact that no standard definition exists," thus the recognition

of this subjective "fluidity moves away from ideas of inherently flawed individuals and toward accounts of dynamically situated bodies and identities" (Herndon 132). Therefore, anyone can consider themselves or other people to be "fat" regardless of actual weight or body type because everybody has different aesthetic standards as to what thinness and fatness means. Even though hegemonic beliefs about desirable physiques affect both men and women, women typically experience fatphobia in worse ways since they are usually socialized into placing a lot of value into their physical appearance. Also, due to menstruation and pregnancy, as Herndon indicates, most women experience fatness and disability to some extent. Since fatness also appears to compromise normative femininity, female obesity also contrasts with male obesity because regardless of stigmas that are placed onto fat men, it is more common for men to reclaim their masculinity. This division between feminine and masculine associations of fatness, thus places big girls into an underrepresented category since even though some may be advocating for female reclamations of fat femininity, there does not seem to be much of this advocacy or a discourse for fat male femininity.

As mentioned above, the queering of fatness in gay male culture seems to subvert the incongruous feminization of fat men because queer discourses typically have more of an acceptance of male femininity, as well as troubling normative concepts of how largeness relates to acceptable masculinity; however, an accepted combination of both fatness and effeminacy has not emerged for men. An example of this can be found in Jason Whitesel's ethnography for a Girth & Mirth convention, a club for large gay men that disrupts "the categories of status and privilege based on body shape and size" because it provides a safe space for fat men to display their bodies and act out "sexuality that has come to be forbidden to big men" (59). Whitesel finds that this safe space utilizes "campy spectacle and joyous carnival," so that these men can "redefine themselves as sex objects: sexual beings who are motivated by the desire of other men" (60), which is a privilege that most conventionally attractive gay men appear to have on a regular basis while the Girth & Mirth men need a separate space to experience this. Thus, this convention for fat gay men appears to resemble what Delta Work refers to as "freak show night." Whitesel addresses the performative dynamic of the men at this convention by commenting on their attire that "shows a rebellious attitude and serves a political function" (82). He notes the "various tee slogans and evocative attire, these big men insinuate, tongue-in-cheek, that being big gives them bigger genitals, rendering their sexuality larger than life," as well as the choice of clothing that accentuate these men's fat bodies instead of hiding them, as they are probably expected to do outside of this designated event, because "such exhibitionism is made possible by the carnival-like atmosphere, which gives [nonnormative] guests license to be sexy and desirable" (Whitesel 82). Aside from the Girth & Mirth guests' clothing, Whitesel also describes a lot of sexually aggressive behavior between the guests, as well as food-related double entendres in the ways that they spoke with each other, which are enactments that are conventionally masculine. Even though such a space shows progress in terms of body image and fat acceptance, this kind of discourse is limited to fat gay men because of the acceptance of fat masculinity, the connection between queer culture and camp, and the cultural acceptance and expectation of gay male promiscuity. As expected, Whitesel identified only one effeminate guest who stood out from his masculine counterparts and did not seem very popular with the other guests when he participated in games and contests at the convention. Thus, this ethnography illustrates not only how there has to be a separate occasion that celebrates fat men and their sexuality because they aren't accepted in regular discourses, but also how someone like Delta might be treated in this primarily masculine environment.

Divine, probably the most popular fat drag queen in history, seems to be notorious for several aspects of her monstrous drag, —such as her makeup style that intersects punk with 50s pin-up, the over-the-top outlaw characters that she is known for in John Waters' movies, etc.—but her fatness combined with other elements of her performance seems to have been the primary contribution to Divine's monstrosity. Unlike many other drag queens who took pride in their cinched waists that made them appear more curvy and feminine, Divine never tried to conceal her pudginess with a corset and even flaunted it by wearing short, form-fitting, colorful garments that emphasized her large figure instead. In her discussion about how Divine's performance in *Hairspray* served as a foil to white supremacy, Ragan Rhyne contends that Divine's fatness combined with her actions portrayed a failure of whiteness, femininity, and class. She states that Divine's character, Edna Turnblad, and Ricki Lake's character, Tracy Turnblad, re-appropriate the body of white women to challenge white supremacy because since they are fat, brunette foils to the thin, blonde, racist characters, Velma and Amber Von Tussle, their bodies are immediately marked as lower-class and racialized (Rhyne 189). Rhyne further states that fatness, when used "as a class marker, comes to be a primary code through which Divine's drag performance denaturalizes the whiteness implicit in normative femininity" because, as usual in John Waters films and camp media in general, Divine's rhetoric involves "reassigning value to the valueless… through the performance of whiteness, or of 'white trash'" (190). Therefore, like the Girth & Mirth men, Divine uses camp to

perform and reclaim fatness as a superior marker of desirability and status even though many people don't share that point of view. In fact, Divine and John Waters intentionally reassign value to things that are considered filthy or trashy as a way of ironically reifying classist assumptions about the lower classes, as well as creating absurdly fictional spaces that equalize members from all kinds of cultural groups. Because everyone produces filth regardless of where they come from or who they are, this emphasizes how the basis of prejudices are usually superfluous.

Similar to Jack Halberstam's "queer art of failure" that embraces the element of failure because it "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" (3) that Foucault addresses, fat drag not only celebrates the "failure" of heteronormative gender and sexuality, but also a failure of body type. Instead of being caught up in how their fat bodies fail to align with normative concepts of beauty, big girls use this perceived failure of body type to be transgressive by flaunting what society wants them to repress. With Divine as an example, big girl performance seems to ironically acknowledge that fatness isn't widely accepted and probably can't or shouldn't be "fixed", so they perform their bodies in ways that acknowledge what the fatphobic public is presumably saying or thinking, but playfully ignore the criticism while articulating realities about fatness. Since big girls do not succeed as much on *RPDR*, perhaps the art of failure could be applied to this context of failure that seems to enforce a standardized form of drag.

Situating Fat Performativity: Examining Fat Drag and Fatness in Drag

As mentioned above, performing fatness often involves a campy reification of fat stereotypes, whether it is to subvert normative assumptions about fat people or exploit fatness by reinforcing fat phobia, that exist in media, which is what big girls use as a basis for their drag performances. For example, like the *RPDR* big girls, token fat characters in movies and TV shows often make fatness part of their identities by constantly eating (particularly sweets and other fatty foods); behaving obnoxiously towards thinner characters; and expressing some sort of displeasure with their weight, not to mention other characters' displeasure toward overweight characters. These common tropes that are written for fat characters, and typically played by fat actors, have created a set standard for what is recognized as fat performance. Furthermore, fictive elements such as "fixing fat" narratives and Hollywood portrayals of fat stereotypes have become so common in movies that the idea of "fat drag," a performance of fatness by thin actors in fat suits, has become a recognizable trope. The fat drag medium lends itself to what I am referring to as "fixing fat" narratives because storylines that involve obese people losing an extreme amount of weight at some point during a film's sequence requires the fast-and-easy body transformation technology of CGI and prosthetics. As mentioned about the weight loss rhetoric in advertisements for dietary and fitness products, fatness is often treated as a curable disease that requires much-needed prevention for those who are not fat and "fixing" for those who are, which caters to the idea that all fat people have to be in control of their bodies, as well as be self-conscious of their weight with hopes of losing their fat someday. Therefore, the transformative nature of "fixing fat" narratives and "fat drag" in popular movies cater to these fatphobic tropes unlike big girls, who technically count as "fatness in drag" since big girls put their own bodies in drag, even though they are expected to perform fatness as recognized in pop culture.

In Kathleen LeBesco's connection between fat suit performance with drag's subversive playfulness and blackface's racist mockery, she makes the case that the satirical distance between well-known thin actors and their over-the-top fat characters makes the real "threat" of drastic weight-gain seem comical, thus less threatening. Since everyone is capable of gaining weight and there is a prominent stigma surrounding fatness, gaining weight is often conceived of as a fear that everyone does or should have. LeBesco argues that since fat suit performances and weight gain/loss narratives "reassure audiences by showing us lean, conventionally attractive actors unencumbered by fatness outside of the film's frames, there is ultimately little difference in threat levels" (236). In reference to the completely comical use of fatness in *The Nutty Professor* and the somewhat sad and heartfelt use of fatness in *Shallow Hal*, she explains the gender differences in these narratives by stating that since women are typically socialized toward dieting, they "do not require the crudeness or jokiness of the fat suit to feel more comfortable about their own bodies" the way that men do because women are more likely to identify with fat female characters, while fat male characters are usually made out to be more outrageous and spectacular (LeBesco 236). Thus, like in drag performance, fat drag addresses body politics in a humorous and campy style; however, the artifice of fat drag is also appropriative because it exploits fat people in ways that reflect the exploitation of black people in minstrel shows. Therefore, LeBesco contends that "the threat of black folks and freaks was a threat from without" because spectators of freak shows "wanted to see the genuine article, so different from them, while they simultaneously feared confrontation or attack," while the fear of fatness is a threat that is "perceived to be from within" because everyone has "the capacity to become fat" (238). LeBesco's connection

between racial and bodily spectacles that have been featured in entertainment addresses how nonnormative bodies are often portrayed as either horrific or monstrous, therefore something that needs to be defeated, or comedic and unthreatening in order to make bodily differences more laughable than scary. Ironically, Divine's characters are often made to exemplify both kinds of spectacle; however, since her characters exist outside from heteronormative control, in the John Waters universe, she has more control over her use of spectacular status and her authentically fat body, which is a power that most drag queens hold.

Katharina R. Mendoza takes LeBesco's argument about "fixing fat" narratives in fat suit movies a step further by suggesting that these narratives with instantaneous transformations from extreme obesity to thinness not only reify assumptions that every fat person wants or needs to be thin, but imply that standards for intrinsic beauty are essentially as superficial as the standards for outer beauty. She states that "by looking at how the fat suit is deployed in the service of a narrative we can see how such films are just the latest manifestations of the 'inside every fat person is a thin person' trope so often found in weight loss discourse" because the presence of the fat body in these kinds of movies are "always contingent on and shaped by the presence of its corresponding thin body" (281). For example, in *Shallow Hal*, "the fat suit enables a disorienting representation" of Rosemarie who "simultaneously inhabits two bodies at opposite ends of the size spectrum," and in *The Nutty Professor*, Sherman "instantaneously morphs from one body into the other and then back again," which presents an unequal relationship between the fat and thin body, with the thin body being the dominant one (Mendoza 281). Rosemarie's thin body dominates in *Shallow Hal* because actor, Gwyneth Paltrow, appears as her thin-self for most of the movie and is the primary love interest, while her fat-suited body only appears in brief scenes and is used for comic relief. Although Buddy Love, Sherman's thin alter-ego, does not necessarily dominate screen time, Buddy's main villainous objective in the movie is to take over Sherman's body. Mendoza thus points out that "the composite body of actor and prosthetic costume represents the fat body in a way that exposes the interaction between desire and disgust while also driving home the point that only normative bodies are allowed to cross the boundary dividing fat and thin" (284), meaning that while fat characters can turn thin in these movies, thin characters can't turn fat because the objective in these movies is always to attain a normative body. Furthermore, the messages in these movies indicate that the fat character's superficial desires for thinness and attractiveness is the same thing as their "inner beauty," which contradicts the idea of inner beauty because it imposes fat phobic, therefore shallow, ideals onto a kind of beauty that is typically framed as more genuine and less superficial. Thus, the performance of fatness in fixing fat narratives appear to include assumptions about fat people wanting to be thin and normative, that it is appropriate to use fatness as a spectacle for laughs or fear of becoming obese, and that it is possible for fat people to change. These assumptions relate to Kwan's and Graves' point about how all bodies are expected to be equally as capable of control. With the standard fat tropes that exist in pop culture, the prominence of fat phobia in society, and drag rhetoric's reliance on allusions to pop culture in the physical world, an attempt to separate big girls from the dominant expectations of fat performance seems as if it would be futile.

Conclusion

Since *RuPaul's Drag Race* has established a standard form of drag, the big girls who compete on the show are expected to follow specific standards that have been set for them based on previous fat drag queens, cultural fat phobia, and fat tropes in popular culture. As seen in token fat characters and the big girls on *RPDR*, there appears to be a need for fat performers to display a sense of self-awareness of their bodies, presumably because it indicates a sense of control—either that they are being controlled with self-consciousness and a longing for weight loss to become "normal" or that the fat person is in control of their own body by showing that they accept it. Other tropes include a constant consumption of food, which when it is observed in the big girls' performances, seems to indicate an ironic lack of self-control (as if they literally can't stop eating) that simultaneously reinforces the control that they do have over their bodies since their eating becomes rhetorical to reify fat stereotypes, as well as emphasize that nobody can control their eating habits. These subversions in big girl performances appear to acknowledge the expectations that are placed onto people with similar figures, while challenging normative attempts to control them and their bodies. Although these subversions are entertaining to audiences and empowering to big girls, it makes attempts for these queens to break away from standard fat performance nearly impossible, thus obligating all big girls on *RPDR* to perform only what is expected of them without getting as far in the competition as thinner contestants.

Since there are discourses acknowledging the acceptance of fat men, even though these discourses fetishize them, there needs to be more of a discourse that embraces fat effeminacy, one capable of overlapping with the embrace of fat femininity and the sexual inclusion of fat women. The connection between fatness and femininity should be further

emphasized to make this embrace of fat femininity and effeminacy possible by showing how fatness can be desirable when observed on a feminine body. However, I realize that the masculinity of fatness is probably more accepted because masculinity in general is more accepted, which places a double jeopardy onto fat femininity. A solution to this masculine-feminine dichotomy can probably be found in the overt gender troublings that are found in big girl, as well as other kinds of drag performances because even though drag queens may appear completely hyper-feminine or drag kings hyper-masculine, they typically occupy spaces in between masculine and feminine since they make their natural and their performed bodies rhetorical. This rhetoricizing of the complicated drag body usually seems to emphasize the fact that no real-life person is completely masculine or feminine in the way that characters in pop culture are often portrayed. Therefore, big girls should use this troubling of masculinity and femininity to open up an accepted discourse of fat effeminacy, which can then trouble the idea of fat femininity in women, to complicate assumptions about fatness. In a way, by creating aesthetically pleasing and sexually suggestive drag looks on their fat bodies, big girls have already complicated linkages between body type and attractiveness, as well as how much "should be" revealed or concealed on the fat body; however, there has not been much of a bridge to connect what is found appealing in fat gay men that isn't fully appreciated in fat women, which might be the key to this kind of discourse.

_____

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Rutledge Classics, 1994.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage-Random House, 1975.

Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke UP, 2011.

Herndon, April. "Disparate but Disabled: Fat Embodiment and Disability Studies." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. 131-32.

Kwan, Samantha, and Jennifer Graves. *Framing Fat: Competing Constructions in Contemporary Culture*, Rutgers UP, 2013.

LeBesco, Kathleen. "Situating Far Suits: Blackface, Drag, and the Politics of Performance." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2005, pp. 236-38.

Mendoza, Katherina R. "Seeing Through the Layers: Fat Studies and Thin Bodies in *The Nutty Professor* and *Shallow Hal*." *The Fat Studies Reader*, edited by Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay, NYU P, 2009, pp. 281-84.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. U of Minnesota P, 1999.

Rhyne, Ragan. "Racializing White Drag. *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 46, no. ¾, 2004, pp. 189-90.

Whitsel, Jason. *Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma*. NYU P, 2014.

Daniela Conte

VOICE, CULTURAL IDENTITY, AND INCLUSION

EXAMINING AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXCLUSION AND URBAN LANGUAGE ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Gloria Anzaludúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* describes the acculturation process as violent and cruel, effectively muting the voices of minority groups to keep them and their experiences marginalized. This description sparks many questions about the experience of minority groups in higher education, especially concerning language: are marginalized cultures able to keep their ethnic identities present in higher education composition? Furthermore, should there be space for cultural identity in academia? The poet Ernestine Johnson explained the notion of "talking white" in her spoken word poem, "The Average Black Girl" (2014). Johnson shares her experience of learning to "talk white" in order to succeed. Johnson's poem portrays issues African-Americans experience in higher education, concerning their language and cultural identity. In 1996, the Oakland Ebonics Resolution caused controversy and debate over the legitimacy of Ebonics (Perry and Delpit xi). Despite the heated discussions, writing reform in urban English Language Arts classrooms does not reflect implications of the Oakland Ebonics Resolution. Why has the discussion over Ebonics ended? Considering Peter Elbow's influential work in the field of composition, which contributed to the explosion of student-centered instruction, it seems troubling that a connection between cultural identity and writing voice has not been adequately addressed in the field of writing studies for urban education. A quick study of graduation statistics will reveal that not all ethnic groups are receiving equal opportunities; African-American students from urban communities continue to drop out of higher education at a much higher rate than white students ("Fast Facts"). Horace Mann, the educational reformer, wrote in the 1800s about the power and duty of education: he stated, "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (16). If education is meant to be an equalizer, why are there still marginalized students in higher education? Furthermore, since this was the goal of education in the 1800s, why hasn't there been more reform present in the twenty-first century? Progress has not been constant; the debates surrounding composition, writing voice, and cultural identity must be continued. This conversation should also be augmented with a focus on digital rhetoric to acknowledge shifting tides in composition, considering the technological advancements of our time. Examining the assumptions surrounding writing instruction and student voices in higher education ideally will create more value for all student writing voices, not just the ones who fit in the mold of traditional academic voice typically seen in higher education.

Before arguing for change, we need a closer examination of writing composition over the years to chart the process, and lack of progress, in writing reform. In the introduction to *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, Peter Elbow outlines three major debates in composition which continue to be unresolved: discourse as text versus discourse as voice, ethos as real virtue in the real person versus ethos as the appearance of virtue, and voice as self versus voice as role. For the purpose of this paper, the third debate, voice as self versus voice as role, will provide the strongest connection to the place of cultural identity in academia. The issue of voice in composition has been continuously discussed and debated; Elbow further explains, "Indeed with Derrida's focus on what he called the metaphysics of voice and presence, this issue of voice/discourse/identity has become one of the main critical issues in all of English studies, cultural studies, and critical theory" (xix). Elbow distinguished the ongoing discussion surrounding voice and identity in written discourse to establish the longevity of this study. Throughout the decades of composition study, voice has taken on a godly stance, referring to some magical property in written discourse. This stance is problematic as it makes writing inaccessible by placing the issue of voice on a pedestal. Elbow acknowledges the metaphorical layers surrounding the term voice and attempts to clarify voice by establishing five features: audible voice, dramatic voice, recognizable voice, voice with authority, and resonant voice (xx). These five features clarify some of the mystique surrounding voice and provide specific measures of assessment. However, these five features are challenged and complicated through the inclusion of cultural identity. Would all cultures recognize the same voices as dramatic, resonant, or authoritative? In narrative, voice is clearly developed to represent a specific character. Of course, there is a difference between narrative writing and academic writing; however, narrative writing provides other methods of sharing knowledge outside of academic writing. Notably, qualitative research has contributed to a growth of personal narrative as a method of inquiry; Bud

Goodall is one such scholar who examines this development. Referencing philosopher Sara Worth and her work presented at a 2005 MIT conference, Goodall explains "the idea of narrative knowledge as a special form of reasoning" and connects this idea with recent changes in education (13). Goodall addresses the value of this new form of writing and maintains that it just as valuable as academic writing. Goodall argues, "The basic idea is that when we engage in writing or telling a story, we create alternative pathways to meaning that are imaginative *and* analytical … *it alters the way we think about* what we know and how we know it" (14). While Goodall goes on to provide advice for developing writers who want to attempt this new mode of writing, his original points reinforce the value of this type of writing, which could provide an alternative to traditional academic voice. This connection between narrative and voice in composition is further expanded by other scholars. In Walker Gibson's article, he uses examples from literature to demonstrate that there are clear, distinct voices in narrative writing, yet this is not as apparent in academic writing. Gibson explains possible reasons for this by declaring, "The problem that all writers face is the loss of both voicebox and kinesics. The writer's task is to so surround his words with other words on the page that readers may infer the quality of the desired speaking voice" (13). Narrative writing may be a tool for writers to successfully complete this task. Clearly, narrative writing is not meant to replace academic writing; however, it certainly can be an alternative for student writers as they develop their own unique writing voice.

The call for alternative methods of writing in education is not a new one. Scholars of composition have continually examined shifts in composition and proposed changes for writing pedagogy to reflect these developments. In an article examining the true value of rhetoric, Edward P. J. Corbett explains the purpose of rhetoric as dynamic. Corbett begins by stating, "One of the things revealed by the history of the successive eras of rhetoric is the remarkable adaptability of this discipline to the changing spirit and needs of the times" (26). Rhetoric, then, continually adapts for the purposes of writers at different times. This declaration complicates pedagogy by raising questions about writing instruction. If rhetoric changes to better suit a changing society, surely then writing instruction must also adapt. This is a critical aspect of education; students must be proficient in rhetoric to be active members of a society. Corbett further explains that the study of rhetoric is "the discipline that can best equip our students to perform most of the social offices that devolve on them as citizens of the human community" (27). As communities evolve and change, rhetoric then must evolve and change, and therefore, writing pedagogy must as well. First, we must examine the scholarly conversation regarding the change in rhetoric; then, that examination must be analyzed in connection with pedagogical movements to determine if changes in rhetoric are being properly supported in classrooms. Elbow began this conversation regarding shifting attitudes of rhetoric and pedagogy in the 1990s with a public debate with another composition scholar, David Bartholomae (Bartholomae 62). These two scholars represent two different sides of a debate concerning the role of the writer in higher education. Essentially, Elbow argues that writing should belong to the writer from the start of the writing process, while Bartholomae counters that the writer needs to first gain the right to own their writing (Bartholomae 65). Although the debate has not been resolved, it has created new ideas and thoughts about writing pedagogy. In his article, "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process," Elbow further explains this new way of thinking. As the title suggests, Elbow recognizes that the process of teaching writing is complicated by not only the process of teaching, but also the types of students. Elbow explains one of the key issues causing contraries: "We are invited to stay true to the inherent standards of what we teach, whether or not that stance fits the particular students before us" ("Embracing Contraries" 55). This statement evokes the difference in what should be valued in a classroom: the writers or the writing. For Elbow, his stance is clear; he believes that the student writers should be at the forefront of our pedagogical practices. Referencing the psychologist Jean Piaget's influential theory, Elbow argues that writing instruction must involve "both assimilation and accommodation" ("Embracing Contraries" 58). If writing instruction involves both of these two methods, student writers will be the focus of instruction; however, it is important to note that Elbow is not arguing for a one-sided focus solely on student writers. As Elbow clarifies, "In short, there is obviously no one right way to teach, yet I argue that in order to teach well we must find some way to be loyal both to students and to knowledge or society" ("Embracing Contraries" 64). Elbow acknowledges that both these of aspects are important. Therefore, writing instruction must support and value students and their writing. In order for this to occur, Elbow's method of pedagogy, which values the writer over the text, should be implemented. This is especially important for urban education, since the backgrounds of these students will have a heavy influence on their language. Although Elbow provides a generalized view of education, his ideas should be further applied to urban education to recognize and address the value of writing influenced by ethnic background.

In the 1970s, Mina P. Shaughnessy took a stand for some students by addressing issues in basic writing courses that focus solely on the writing product and not the students. Since then, Elbow and other scholars have continued this

stance with their own work. Min-Zhan Lu is one such composition scholar who has connected Shaughnessy's ideas to current issues within writing instruction in her article, "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence." Lu's work is influential in understanding the dynamics behind language and the societal constructions which influence our instruction of writing. Lu studies a "politics of linguistic innocence: that is, a politics which preempts teachers' attention from the political dimensions of the linguistic choices students make in their writing" (152). Aligning with Marxist and poststructuralist theories of language, Lu argues that "language is best understood not as a neutral vehicle of communication but as a site of struggle among competing discourses" (152). This further complicates ideas surrounding writing instruction because it connects to troubling issues of agency and voice for different ethnic groups. Lu states, "Because different discourses do not enjoy equal political power in current-day America, decisions on how to respond to such dissonance are never politically innocent" (153). As Elbow argues, student writers deserve support in the classroom, in order to feel that they have the freedom to experiment with writing techniques. Lu agrees with this statement, while also acknowledging the dire need for changes in thought regarding appropriate types of writing for this support to be true and just. As Lu explains, "Meaning is thus seen as a kind of essence which the writer carries in his or her mind prior to writing … Such a view of the relationship between words and meaning overlooks the possibility that different ways of using words- different discourses- might exercise different constraints on how one 'crafts' the meaning 'one has in mind'" (154). Lu is challenging the notion that written discourse can be defined by one idea. If written discourse is valued as the only style acceptable in Bartholomae's academic world where a writer has to work towards creating a discourse that fits into traditional academic discourse, how will different voices be heard? Furthermore, as Lu also questions, why are other types of discourse not as valued? In this type of situation, writing instruction then becomes not about the student writer, as Elbow envisioned, but more about molding a student to write in a traditional style, instead of allowing for different voices. Lu further explains the effect of this way of thinking by clarifying, "That is, it might teach students to 'write something in formal English' and 'have something to say' but can help students obtain only a very limited 'freedom of deciding how and when and where' to use which language" (154). This would mean that the purpose of writing pedagogy is not to inspire the development of students' own voices; the purpose is to mold student writing in one, traditional method of writing. Lu further clarifies the dangers of this type of instruction by illuminating, "It may very well lead students to see the function and form of English as a timeless linguistic law which they must respect, adapt to, and perpetuate rather than as a specific existing circumstance resulting from the historically unequal distribution of social power, and as a condition which they must recognize but can also call into question and change" (159). Lu's view inspires students to challenge educational structures which attempt to confine their voices in traditional writing styles. Traditional writing instruction ultimately fails students because it does not acknowledge and respect the variety of different discourses present in a society. Students come from different backgrounds and have different ideas about the development of their own writing voice and style. If writing instruction does not provide space for differing types of written discourse, the student writer is not given the chance to develop their own writing voice in academia.

Disconnections between student writing voice and higher education are further examined in Gerald Graff's article, "The Academic Language Gap." Graff takes Lu's ideas one step further by analyzing student reactions to the "rhetorical posture of argument-maker" (24). This rhetorical position is one often used in secondary and higher education as a type of writing assessment. Graff explains the gap created by students and higher education with this type of writing assessment with three reasons. He begins by arguing that the role of an argument-maker "rests on a conception of citizenship that has become increasingly unreal" (24). Graff argues that the diminished role of citizens in society causes students to feel as if their writing is "hollow" because it is likely that their written discourses will not have effects beyond the page. Although Graff does not address the role of audience in his argument; I would argue that this also connects to the function of audience. The article "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy" by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford analyzes the function and importance of audience in writing studies. Throughout their article, Ede and Lunsford argue that the role of audience is often overlooked in composition courses as a way to engage writers within the writing process. If students are to engage in genuine writing, audience must move beyond the teacher and classroom. Therefore, students will be more authentically engaged when writing. Ede and Lunsford explain the goal of addressing audience in composition, "A fully elaborated view of audience, then, must balance the creativity of the writer with the different, but equally important, creativity of the reader. It must account for a wide and shifting range of roles for both addressed and invoked audiences" (169). Although the addressed audience might only be the professor teaching the course, if students are taught to consider the invoked audience, their written discourse will have a powerful focus; furthermore, invoked audiences will also provide opportunities for

"hollow" writing to become meaningful writing. Graff follows his argument about hollow writing by examining how an American mindset also negatively impacts students' attitudes toward rhetoric; Graff describes this mindset as an "American suspicion of intellectualism, which is still often identified widely with aggression, aloofness, and a snobbish elitism" (24). Essentially, for student writers, the traditional language of rhetoric is distorted by a way of thinking which rebuffs a strict, formal discourse. If students were able to read and write in a discourse that does not evoke "aloofness and a snobbish elitism," there would be the opportunity for students to truly engage in the writing process and create meaningful written discourse. Lastly, Graff attacks the issue of rhetoric itself as an alienating factor, "The academic obsession with problems and problematizing … appears strange and counterintuitive not just to students but to most nonacademics" (25). This issue relates to shifts in education which were caused by Peter Elbow's work; a focus on developing student writing voice is now challenging previous ideas about what exactly comprises rhetoric. These challenges attempt to create a more equal balance of power in a writing classroom to allow space for different types of voices. While progress has been made, there are still changes that need to happen, especially regarding African-American discourse.

The unequal balance of power in regards to writing voice parallels the unequal balance of power in society. Although educational reform has attempted to make progressive changes, there are still "homogenized views of 'the student' that ignore cultural and cognitive differences" (Graff 28). As examined by Elbow, Graff, Shaughnessy, and Lu, written discourse is influenced by a variety of factors; I would argue that the most important factor which is overlooked in a classroom is ethnic background. Furthermore, I would also argue that marginalized ethnic groups are not valued as writers in academia unless they fulfill the traditional acceptable writing voice, even though this might not reflect their cultural identity and language. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on urban African-American identity in higher education and the muting of their cultural voices; however, I acknowledge that there are other cultural groups with the same struggle.

In 1996, the Oakland Unified School District in California passed a resolution to recognize the legitimacy of Ebonics as a step towards improving the underachievement of African-American students enrolled throughout the district (Perry and Delpit xi). While the controversy and national debate that followed the resolution has been closely examined by many scholars, the background leading to the resolution is also worthy of mention in understanding the significance of this event. The Oakland Unified School District was facing a crisis; the average grade point average for African-American students was 1.8, falling far behind the average 2.7 grade point average of white students. Furthermore, although the African-American students only comprised 53 percent of the student population, "they represented 80 percent of suspensions and 71 percent of students labeled as special needs" (Perry and Delpit xi). Faced with this disturbing rate of African-American student failure, Prescott Elementary School's above-average performance offered a solution: the Standard English Proficiency program (SEP). This program aimed to improve African-American student growth by acknowledging that "the systemic, rule-governed nature of Black English" should be used "to help children learn to read and write in Standard English" (Perry and Delpit xi). Since Prescott Elementary School drastically improved after implementing SEP, the school board decided to pass an Ebonics resolution to improve the rest of the schools. This resolution sparked an "irrational and racist discourse" which prevented meaningful change for African-American education (Perry and Delpit xii). The Oakland resolution was a powerful change for African-American students because it legitimized their language. Voice and language are power, and the Oakland school district acknowledged the agency of African-Americans by maintaining that Ebonics was a language worthy enough to have a place in education, therefore extending and creating space for African-American identities within education as well. As Theresa Perry supports, "The board further maintained that Ebonics, the home/community language of African-American children, should not be stigmatized, and that this language should be affirmed, maintained, and used to help African-American children acquire fluency in the standard core" (3). This was the idealistic goal of the resolution that was distorted by a media backlash; "called lunatics, Afrocentrists, accused of giving up on Black kids, and of legitimizing slang- these were just some of the invectives hurled at the members of the Oakland school board" (Perry 5). It is important to note that the backlash was not only contained to a white audience; many prominent African-American figures, such as Jesse Jackson and Maya Angelou, also joined the voices protesting the resolution. Perry argues that African-Americans "missed the point" because "Black Language is largely an uncontested arena of Black shame" (6). The Oakland resolution could have been the first step in creating agency through Ebonics and removing the shame and stigma; however, the controversy following the resolution prevented the development of African-American voice in education.

There is shame surrounding Ebonics, and I believe that shame stems from the marginalized place of African-Americans in American society. Language is power, and if African-American students are taught that their language

has no place in the classroom, their agency will not develop and marginalization will continue. The worth of Ebonics is often hidden beneath more acceptable discourses of traditional academia; however, Ebonics is not a "poor sister to English but a language system with roots in West Africa. It is a language that evolved in struggle and under conditions of extreme oppression- a creative response to a slave society that did its best to erase African language and culture" (Perry and Delpit xiv). Although Ebonics may be shamed as "slang," African-American students recognize Ebonics as their language, their voice, and a representation of their identity. As Delpit illustrates, "It is the language spoken by many of our African-American children. It is the language they heard as their mothers nursed them and changed their diapers and played peek-a-boo with them. It is the language through which they first encountered love, nurturance, and joy" (17). When African-American students enter the school system, they are taught their language is shameful; their voices are corrected and deemed lazy or stupid. The impact of this correction obviously has serious consequences in damaging the value African-American students place on their language. Furthermore, African-American students are not given the same opportunity to succeed if their voices are corrected since "forcing speakers to monitor their language typically produces silence" (Delpit 18). If classrooms only allow space for Standard English, African-American students do not have opportunities to gain agency for their own language and voice, which are influenced by Ebonics in urban communities. Therefore, African-American students will feel like they do not truly belong in academia, which I would argue is a contributing factor to the high drop-out rates and low college attendance among African-American students throughout America. However, if African-American students are given the space to speak in their language, influenced by Ebonics, the value of their identity will be reaffirmed and they will feel as if they do belong and have a place in academia. Furthermore, speaking in Ebonics will cause African-American students to gain agency, which is typically denied to them in their marginalized positions in society. When African-American students speak Ebonics, they "assert the power of the tradition in the quest to resolve the unfinished business of being African in America" (Smitherman 37).

The Oakland resolution was a strong starting point for the African-American community; however, among the subsequent controversy, the resolution sputtered and died. It is vital to note that the purpose of the Oakland resolution was to utilize Ebonics to teach Standard English. Therefore, Ebonics was never meant to replace Standard English as an acceptable means of communication, but as a means to grant access to Standard English. While this was revolutionary at the time, the Oakland resolution failed to develop into a fight for African-American language and identity in the classroom because its goal still reinforced Ebonics as a marginalized language. The conversations following the Oakland resolution reflected many teachers' concern about implementing the use of Ebonics in their classroom; Delpit further explains, "Most teachers of those African-American children who have been least well-served by educational systems believe that their students' life chances will be further hampered if they do not learn Standard English" (17). Delpit recognizes the concerns caused by this resolution as valid, and it would be a blind mistake to assume that there is no truth to these concerns. However, I would argue that these concerns are no longer as pertinent in the twenty-first century, due to the many different forms of discourse caused by the digital revolution which now provides a space for all voices, including those influenced by Ebonics. It is important to recognize that although the Internet has provided a space, this does not guarantee that all voices are being heard, or that all voices carry the same weight and agency. The Digital Divide complicates how African-Americans (and other low-income groups) are able to access technology as a valuable and "transformative" tool (Banks 12). However, as the use of technology continues to expand as an essential skill for today's society, educational systems are implementing programs to address the Digital Divide and provide access to low-income students. For African-American students, digital technology and rhetoric provide opportunities for African-American history and identity to flourish; this is vital for this community because "even within a definition of African-American rhetoric as being about the word, careful considerations of how current technologies can extend its study will provide a much richer body of work for rhetorical criticism and analysis" (Banks 25). A strong example of the power of digital technology to create agency for African-American students in their own language is eBlack, created by Abdul Alkalimat, an African-American Students director at the University of Toledo (Banks 22). Alkalimat, a vocal proponent for African-American involvement in technology to gain agency, created eBlack to generate, in his own words, a "virtualization of the Black experience." As seen by the explosion of digital activism, digital rhetoric is a meaningful form of discourse, which has a real audience and purpose, while also creating a space for individual voice: the goals of composition theory discussed by Elbow. For African-American students, this new form of discourse creates not only a space for their voice, but also a method to cause change and to fight for agency. The digital revolution has allowed "African-American rhetorical scholars far richer analysis of those speeches and writings considered to be within the tradition, but can also open those traditions up beyond just the word and show it has always been multimedia, using all available means in resisting racism and pursuing justice and equal access on behalf of African-American people" (Banks 38-39).

The multiple types of discourse available within digital rhetoric are varied and intricate, but for the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the study of remix as a new form of discourse available through digital literacy which allows for a development of unique voices reflective of cultural identity and language. Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber have argued that we currently write in a "remix culture," which distorts previous notions regarding "plagiarism, originality, and assemblage" (375). The remix culture refers to different types of discourses, such as text, video, and audio, which change the purpose of writing to be more interactive and collaborative. Furthermore, the remix culture also demonstrates a deeper understanding of a text. Instead of asking students to just regurgitate sources in their own words to fit into traditional academic discourse, remix culture requires students to understand their sources by remixing to create meaning instead of restating sources to attempt a re-wording of ideas. Johnson-Eilola and Selber believe that remixing can exist in education as assemblages, which are texts "built primarily and explicitly from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context" (381). Assemblages recognize that text should be created within pre-existing discourses. Furthermore, assemblages create communities of knowledge to share; this is especially present in online, digital communities. African-American writers of all types of texts would be able to utilize assemblages to create their own community to reflect their language and cultural identity. These communities reflect a much more democratic and interactive way of learning that should be mimicked in classrooms. Additionally, assemblages also encourage new types of text, such as media, which can create engaging instructional methods and assessments. There are changes which must happen for assemblages to succeed beyond academic structures; "Remixing as a form of composition inhibits a contested terrain of creativity, intellectual property, authorship, corporate ownership, and power" (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 392). However, this terrain provides a "new notion of creativity" that is more valuable for students and much more aligned with today's digital society (Johnson-Eilola and Selber 400). Furthermore, remix provides African-American writers a method of expression in which "the mix delivers a message more powerfully than any original alone could, and certainly more than words alone could" (Lessig 71). The exchange of ideas and thoughts online is not limited by strict regulations of traditional academic discourse; remixes are one strong example of how the digital revolution is creating spaces for African-American discourse to fully develop and strengthen their language and cultural identities.

The earlier movements in composition theory and writing pedagogy discussed at the start of this paper present the goals and views of writing instruction: the development of student voice, the role of audience, and authentic purpose. These scholarly conversations continued and progress was made; however, the digital revolution truly enabled these goals to be realized. This is especially important for African-American students since "in public education for children and youth as well as in higher education, social, cultural, linguistic, racial, class, and gender issues remain salient concerns of people of color" (Jackson and Jordán 2). These concerns have not been properly addressed since higher education still maintains a focus on the traditional academic voice of Bartholomae's academic world. However, the digital revolution has now provided education with valuable resources to create spaces for all types of discourses. African-American students can utilize these types of discourses, such as remix, to develop writing voices which reflect their language, influenced by Ebonics as a reflection of their rich history and culture.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Banks, Adam J. *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2006.

Bartholomae, David. "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow." *National Council of Teachers of English*, vol. 46, issue 1, 1995, pp. 62-71. JSTOR. 5 Nov. 2015.

Corbett, Edward P. J. "Rhetoric, the Enabling Discipline." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 4th edition, edited by Edward P. J. Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 26-35.

Delpit, Lisa. "What Should Teachers Do: Ebonics and Culturally Responsive Instruction." *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*, edited by Lisa D. Delpit and Theresa Perry, Beacon, 1998, pp. 17-28.

Delpit, Lia, D, and Theresa Perry. Preface. *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*, Beacon, 1998, pp. xi-xiv.

Ede, Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford. "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 4th edition, edited by Edward P. J. Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 320-34.

Elbow, Peter. "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 4th ed, edited by Edward P. J. Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 54-65.

Elbow, Peter, editor. *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*. Hermagoras, 1994.

"Fast Facts." *National Center for Education Statistics.* US Department of Education, 2013, 15 Oct. 2015.

Gibson, Walker. "The 'Speaking Voice' and the Teaching of Composition." Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing, edited by Peter Elbow, Hermagoras, 1994, pp. 11-17.

Goodall, H. L. *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories, and Academic Life*. Left Coast, 2008.

Graff, Gerald. "The Academic Language Gap." *The Relevance of English: Teaching That Matters in Students' Lives*, edited by Robert P. Yagelski and Scott A. Leonard, National Council of Teachers of English, 2002, pp. 23-35.

Jackson, Sandra, and José Solís Jordán. "Being in Higher Education: Negotiating Identity and Place." Introduction, *I've Got a Story to Tell: Identity and Place in the Academy*, P. Lang, 1999, pp. 1-7.

Johnson, Ernestine. "Ernestine Johnson Performs 'The Average Black Girl' on Arsenio Hall Show." *YouTube*, 14 April 2014, 1 Oct. 2015.

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, and Stuart A. Selber. "Plagiarism, Originality, and Assemblage." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 24, 2007, pp. 375-403. 1 Oct. 2015.

Lessig, Lawrence. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. Penguin, 2008.

Lu, Min-Zhan. "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, 4th ed, edited by Edward P. J. Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate, Oxford UP, 2000, pp. 152-62.

Mann, Horace. *Lectures on Education*. Arno, 1969.

Perry, Theresa. "'I'on Know Why They Be Trippin': Reflections on the Ebonics Debate." *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*, edited by Lisa D. Delpit and Theresa Perry, Beacon, 1998, pp. 3-16.

Smitherman, Geneva. "Black English/Ebonics: What It Be Like?" *The Real Ebonics Debate: Power, Language, and the Education of African-American Children*, edited by Lisa D. Delpit and Theresa Perry, Beacon, 1998, pp. 29-37.

Stephen Florian

Colin Kaepernick's Protest Rhetoric as Discursive Protext

As a composition instructor, I often think about the effectiveness of a standard written essay in my classroom. A prevailing fear is whether or not my students care about the topic: Is this idea compelling to them? Will the reading and response change them in a way that produces knowledge? Or am I effectively giving them narrow, prescriptive assignments to teach them all the elements of a well-constructed essay that do not offer them any sort of possibility for transformation in the process? In this essay, I am arguing for a composition class with a protest rhetoric component that is potentially meaningful to the student writer as a tool for engagement, as well as a vehicle for knowledge production. I will explore the possibility of protest rhetoric as a supplemental non-traditional text to facilitate a deeper engagement with the process of a first-year composition class. In the end, I will offer a possible assignment as a concrete example of what I mean by engaging with protest rhetoric as a culturally responsive pedagogy.

In my composition class, I assign *Garbology* by Edward Humes because it exemplifies America's unbridled propensity to create garbage. When students engage with this text, they are obliged to create an awareness about their own garbage production. Once we enter this segment of the class, they begin to experience some moral outrage around their relationship to garbage. Some of the students start to transform into fledgling pollution activists and it often motivates the work on their final research papers for the class. The in-class discussions often teeter on the edge of a protest around how everyone should reduce the amount of garbage they create. My desire is to expand on this level of engagement and to show students how their protestations can be not only the emergence of a text, but also a productive apparatus for academic inquiry.

If students are given the agency to find issues that are personal to them (Sommers and Saltz 125; McCrary 6), issues that are worthy of protest, perhaps they will feel a deeper engagement with the productive aspects of the composition classroom through an embodied form of rhetoric and persuasion. If the student writing is personal and connected, the writer will have a clear understanding of their audience and their potential expectations, they will experiment with how to temper the Aristotelian triad of ethos, pathos, and logos in a more meaningful way, and their arguments may become more clearly focused because the issues relate to the student's subjective worldview. To make this connection between protest and the classroom I will use Bruce McComiskey's *Teaching Composition as a Social Process* to conceptualize a methodology for incorporating protest rhetoric into the composition classroom in concert with and exploration of Colin Kaepernick's protest rhetoric. Because students are more likely to be engaged and learn if they care, it is important that they find something they can care about deeply and protest against—this will strengthen all related pedagogy.

Kaepernick's Protest

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick offers an interesting template for a more engaged student essay in the form of an embodied protest rhetoric. Kaepernick made national headlines in 2016 when he chose to sit and not stand for the national anthem. This act of resistance generated

a great deal of outrage, mostly because many people have interpreted his protest as a disrespectful gesture toward the American flag signifying an abject lack of patriotism. Post-gesture, Kaepernick informed his dissenters that, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color" (Wyche). Kaepernick's noncompliance, his essential non-action of sitting is an encumbered textual gesture that sends a message that he is not only making an argument—he is also starting one. For Paulo Freire, oppression is a societal ill that must be elucidated by an active response paired with intellectual vigor: "This solution cannot be achieved in idealistic terms. In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (4). This gesture for Kaepernick is a transgressive act, an active claim that there are problems and issues that need to be addressed in a manner that requires the oppressor to desist and the oppressed to equally resist. But Kaepernick's gesture is not enough: the gesture must be contextualized and generate a discourse that allows the marginalized some form of intermediary space to transform. This space can be created or appropriated by the oppressed joining the movement, much in the way the Occupy Wall Street movement controlled Zuccotti Park and other locations. For Freire the next ingredient for a successful outcome requires that the protester not denigrate the hegemony being resisted: to truly be liberated, freedom must be conferred. "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity…the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle" (Freire 3). Kaepernick is careful in both his protest and his rhetoric that follows not to ascribe blame to a specific target, but rather to denounce an overarching ideology that enforces oppression, therefore reifying Freire's admonition.

Kaepernick's peaceful protest seemed like a potentially divisive issue that would ignite a larger civic and societal discussion—or better yet—an actual argument that would open the door to nationwide conversation on race and class. It was presumed that many other professional athletes would join Kaepernick, but most left him to press forward on his own. The few that did join in, did so in a limited capacity. When the NFL season ended, Kaepernick exercised his option to walk away from his contract with his team, the San Francisco 49ers—saving the team close to 12 million dollars. Kaepernick then became a free agent but no other teams in the NFL would add him to their roster. He was labeled, classified, and categorized as a troublemaker. Many claimed that his presence would be a distraction to any team that would sign him. When a handful of NFL players decided to carry on Kaepernick's method of protest in the 2017 NFL season, the person most outraged by their message was the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump. His reaction to their protests and the likewise demonizing of other professional athletes who choose to exercise their right to free speech is not only beyond the scope of his duties but also sends a dangerous message. His immediate and unconsidered response was for the players to recognize their "privilege" as professional athlete and that if they don't conform to his perceived view of patriotism, the punishment should be termination by the owners of their respective teams. NFL players and other professional athletes play sports because the free-market system enables them to sell their labor power in the market place at a price agreed upon by the player and the owner—not because it is a privilege.

Kaepernick is functioning not merely as a dissenter but rather as "a politically engaged radical critic" (Gordon 194), to the degree that he is kneeling for those who are systematically marginalized by those controlling the ideology of society. The image of Kaepernick's various protests are not original, they are intertextually connected to many other protests and perhaps most notably the

image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. kneeling in prayer and the black power protests of Tommie Smith and John Carlos during the medal ceremony of the two-hundred-meter track sprints at the 1968 Mexico Olympics. While the chronological distance between events is vast, the ideological space between these images is hinged by the mortise and tenon of the continued struggle of African Americans to have a voice in American society.

The resistance toward Kaepernick began instantaneously because his actions subverted traditional cultural norms situated in patriotic acts. Bloomfield and Doolin note that, "When the body conforms to society's expectations, the categories of the social order, and thereby the boundaries that help define them, are reaffirmed; conversely, departures from accepted norms threaten those boundaries and invite sanction or censorship" (507). It is noteworthy that Kaepernick initially presented his claim without saying or writing a word. Kaepernick's sitting and later kneeling gesture sparked a dialogue that has been both punitive and progressive, mostly materializing in the form of newspapers, television, and social media. One of the purposes of teaching first-year composition is to help students find their voice. Kaepernick found his in a silent act. This begs the questions: how is this writing, and is it applicable to the composition classroom? Can protest rhetoric engage student writers in the composition classroom in a manner that is transformative?

Protest Rhetoric

To better understand, apprehend, and interact with Kaepernick's argument it would be reasonable to view his actions through the lens of protest rhetoric. The problem with this avenue of inquiry is that much of what is written on protest rhetoric is from the 1970s and 1980s, while the scholarship trails off dramatically in the 1990s. The social unrest of the 1960s generated academic interest in studying the rhetoric of protests as well as creating a framework for studying the implications of social unrest on society. While some of these forms of protest materialized as written text, much of the protest studied was embodied action, "marches, concerts, riots, bombings, and sit-ins, to name a few…coded acts of non-verbal communication" (Jensen 28-29). According to Berlin, the writing classroom was vital in situating public as well as protest rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s (477). Protest rhetoric is in somewhat of a regressive phase for academia.

What is compelling in the analysis of protest rhetoric is less whether the protest is relevant or has attracted a large audience, but rather, whether the protest is about the individual protesting, or about a larger societal issue? While both are valid forms of protest, the audience must be able to critically ascertain the nature and the scope of the issue and then respond accordingly. Explicating the nature of the protest from an academic purview is not meant to denigrate the protester, but rather to ensure that the protester and audience are not merely engaged in arguing semantics. Perhaps more importantly, is there is a more significant socially relevant issue that is evolving into a dialectic that precipitates change or even progress? If the audience of Kaepernick's protest is critically engaged, they can decide if they wish not just to join Kaepernick, but also how they can expand the conversation and how they can defend or deflect the inevitable ad hominem attacks that are often meant to derail social protest and which undermine the hegemonic ideology of the culture being protested against.

The picture of Kaepernick sitting or kneeling during the national anthem is a powerful image that has polarized many on the meaning or definition of oppression as well as patriotism. Visual rhetoric transmits graphic descriptions or signs to generate signifiers that facilitate the exchange of ideas (Bulmer and Buchanan☐Oliver 55). Because Kaepernick is abstaining from participation in a patriotic gesture, the negation of the act informs the protest, but it cannot define it. Kaepernick's gesture is endowed with a plethora of implications and grievances. Semiotic richness is replete

with assorted meanings and possibilities (Kopper 445). It is incumbent upon Kaepernick to ascribe a purpose to the act but the audience will ultimately produce the meaning socially. This may be a troubling concept for protesters, especially if they desire to control the message of the protest. It would be acceptable if the protester were functioning from an egocentric position, but if the protest is a rhetorical strategy to promote dialogue, social justice, and transformation then the protester must be willing to allow the socially constructed meaning to generate the dialogue.

Most college campuses in the United States are as diverse as they have ever been. Students of color, international students, and otherwise marginalized students must be deliberate and facile in deciphering the protest rhetoric of the opposition as well as being purposeful in generating a reasoned response to oppression. Mikhail Bakhtin notes that: "we *act* confidently only when we do so not as ourselves, but as those possessed by the imminent necessity of the meaning of some domain of culture" (21). Bringing protest rhetoric into the composition classroom is a relevant form of argument analysis that can be a tool for progress as well as a mechanism to defend against tyranny of any sort.

Looking at this from a social constructivist lens, Kaepernick's detractors as well as his proponents are creating the content of his composition by making meaning from his text. Kaepernick's simple act of subversion has caused an avalanche of textual response. News articles or memetic protests not only write his text for each individual that encounters Kaepernick's message, but in an act of intertextual fission, are writing their own protest message; the audience will have the final say on meaning that is particular to each reader's subjective response.

This interaction with audience, in relation to text and response, is really a distillation of the notion of joining in the academic conversation that is part of rhet/comp's mission: engagement and conversation that elevates discourse. Recursive engagement is one of the many concepts that can be achieved through an engaged student writer. If we can encourage students to write about a topic they care deeply about, writing will become for them a gateway to knowledge production that is both practical and productive.

There is always a class of critics that wish to disrupt, if not silence, any form of transgressive thought or protest that does not adhere to their subjective worldview. In Scott Richard Lyons' book, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*, he identifies this subset as "culture cops" or anyone whose mission it is to cement or fossilize the meaning of a particular culture (94). These culture cops are not relegated to nor do they necessarily exist outside of the repressed culture—often they reside within. There are certainly culture cops attempting to exact their views onto not only Kaepernick's text but the ability to protest injustice in general. In his ESPN.com article, writer Nick Wagoner quotes a fan, who is also a Navy veteran, in response to Kaepernick's protest: "…you don't sit during the national anthem. That's not the way you do it" (Wagoner). This notion demands that Kaepernick adhere to the fan's version of the culture, whether it is the culture of the Navy, the NFL, the San Francisco Giants organization, or the conservative elements of the United States and their prescribed and unalienable views on patriotism.

Kaepernick is enacting what bell hooks refers to as "transformative pedagogy" by inviting all concerned to participate in the conversation (39). Kaepernick is not prescribing rules or boundaries on the conversation in the way that many responding ideologues are attempting to conscript this conversation into a monological referendum on the tenets of patriotism. By Kaepernick's limited responses he is letting this conversation develop organically, and by doing so has unearthed a multitude of responses of what people believe patriotism and protest should look and act like. His gesture of sitting or kneeling during the national anthem of an NFL football game has become the equivalent of holding a mirror up to the collective face of America and forcing them to confront their views on oppression and race. The result has been effective as well as provocative.

Location, Time, and Space

Another area that is worthy of inquiry in order to comprehend fully the strategy employed by the protest rhetorician is location. Often locations of protest are strategically chosen to maximize effect and to deepen the encoding of the message. A rhetorically significant location becomes endowed with not only its original attraction but also with an entrenched connection to the rhetoric of the protest. The lasting effect or cultural meaning is made by the audience of the act, not the protester. If we examine the Mall in Washington D.C. and the multitude of protests that have occurred there, we, as the audience, will determine the coded identity of the location based on our subjective experience. The audience of King's "I Have a Dream" speech will endow this location with an alternate significance than the audience of Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March (Endres and Senda-Cook 257-258). A significantly coded location has the ability to maximize the willingness and the energy to fuel resistance beyond the immediate message and location. In Kaepernick's case, his choice of the NFL stadium as a protest site is without precedent; it is an apolitical space that he has politicized, which may contribute to the extreme responses of his detractors.

Embodied Text

Kaepernick is composing texts with his body and mind that in turn have inspired almost instantaneous texts in response, as well as exploring the vital qualities of gestures as embodied texts. Kaepernick's gesture is a protext: a text that precedes another text. In this case, the written text is the audience's response. The protext manifests itself in sitting or kneeling during the National Anthem, then contextualizing the gesture afterward. Because Kaepernick's form of protest begins with a silent gesture, it is certainly worth examining the motivating engine that is at work. If Kaepernick can create such an impassioned and heterogeneous response to his protest gesture, there must be an essence that not only inspired his embodied text but also that inspires response. While it is not possible for the audience to fully know what that essence is for Kaepernick, in the most general sense it is plausible to assume that Kaepernick has been wounded in regard to some societal inequity. When he does choose to speak he offers that it is not just about his subjective experience. In a *New York Times* article Kaepernick states, "I think having these conversations helps everybody have a better understanding of where everybody is coming from" (Witz). The healing or transformation is generated through a discursive process that involves not just the victims, but society as a whole. Phenomenology is ontologically rooted in essences and his understanding of essence can have weighted impact in the composition of student texts. Merleau-Ponty notes that, "Instead of providing a simple means of delimiting sensations, if we consider it in the experience itself which envinces it, it is as rich and mysterious as the object, or indeed the whole spectacle, perceived" (4). This idea opens the door to numerous ways to elucidate, perceive, and respond to the power inherent in the essence of the embodied gesture: it can be a portal to generate texts as well as explicate them.

Protest Rhetoric in the Composition Classroom

To explicate and respond to Kaepernick's protest rhetoric through the composition classroom I look to McComiskey as a guidepost for transformative possibilities of apprehending this deeply coded act that demands a discursive connection and response. Kaepernick's gesture is effectively what McComiskey refers to as a "position statement" that is a compositional tool—both for the writer and the responder—to disrupt the restrictive classification of "the binary logic of identity/difference oppositions in their critical writing about culture" (75). Because Kaepernick is an elite athlete he can assume the identity position in the identity/difference binary. This binary model for McComiskey is situated in whether or not the student relates to new concepts through the lens of a likeness of the

self, or a difference of the self as an identity marker. By taking on the problems that are enveloped in his protest of exclusion and oppression he is taking on the difference position in the binary model as well, thus nullifying the binary's constrictive effect. Kaepernick is enacting what McComiskey believes the focus of cultural studies composition courses should be: "to teach students to change the cultures that affect them every day by deconstructing binary representations while constructing culturally humane and rhetorically effective subject positions in the aporia between identity and difference." (83) This positioning by Kaepernick may be the strongest stance to take because he has experienced both sides of the binary—not of oppressor and oppressed, but rather, of the privileged and the disenfranchised.

McComiskey has a stated goal to eradicate the binary logic of identity/difference for students that are writing critically about culture by adopting and enacting position statements. These position statements will materialize by the mediation of texts through learned active reading skills. McComiskey's path to position statements is through an assignment protocol that asks students to explicate a text, by way of the student's subjective worldview, using three specific tools: "[(a)] *Accommodating* and acknowledging good ideas (and explaining why they are good), [(b)] *Resisting* and rejecting bad ideas (and explaining why they are bad), and [(c)] *Negotiating* and revising ideas (and explaining how they might best be revised)" (76). For McComiskey, negotiating is the most valuable of the three because it, "requires us to establish our own position in the middle ground among competing texts" (76). This is not achieved through a cursory reading of texts but through a deep interaction and explication beyond surface level concerns. The advantage for the writer is the possibility of situating oneself in the *rond-point* of the multitude of texts that have been generated in connection with a particular text. How then would McComiskey's three tools be an effective device for making meaning of protest rhetoric? I have imagined a possible assignment conceived through the lens of McComiskey's Social Process. The success of this assignment from a social process purview relies on his tools of accommodating, resisting, and negotiating.

The Protest Assignment

The first step in this process is to designate McComiskey's text as the reading that we will base the assignment on. After the reading, a full class discussion will help to situate and contextualize McComoskey's concepts. Once the class has a grounding in the material, then the assignment will follow.

Part 1:

In groups, have students make a list of historical protests, research these protests and discuss them. Then, the group will choose a protest from their list and do a 15-minute presentation to the class outlining and situating the protest historically. The presentation will also include McComiskey's triad of "Accommodating," "Resisting," and "Negotiating" this protest. The goal is to establish the group's "position statement" in reference to this protest. By researching the cause and effects of the protest, along with a historical framework, the group should be able to transcend or subvert the identity/difference binary as a constricting framework and, per McComiskey's ideal outcome, construct "culturally humane and rhetorically effective subject positions" in relation to the protest.

Part 2:

The group will create a protest of its own. Groups will discuss issues that are relevant to them, and then choose something that is connected to their own lives that is protest worthy. Ideally it should an aspect of the culture that needs to be changed. Students will then conceptualize, enact,

and reflect on their protest. Requirements:

1. Define the nature of your protest
2. Design the action of your protest
3. Conceptualize your rhetoric and your strategy
4. Create your "position statement" using McComiskey's concepts
5. Conceptualize your desired outcome
6. Create a heuristic that is capable of examining your protest with a critical lens
7. Define and examine the location of the protest
8. Enact the protest
9. Post protest: examine, classify, and categorize the outcome of your protest
10. The group will write a collaborative three-part essay. Part one is the implementation or the planning of the protest. Part two is an analysis and description of the protest in action. Part three is a framing and situating of the protest. Students will make an analysis of whether or not their protest was successful, whether or not their protest has the potential to evolve, what if anything they would change, and how the protest changed them and the culture. This will result in a 10 to 12-page essay.

This imagined assignment is not radical in its construct, but the component of enacted protest creates the possibility for emergent knowledge. The hope is that the agency granted to students in this assignment will generate interesting perspectives that were perhaps unforeseen and could effect real change in the culture. It offers the possibility of progress through praxis.

Protests are risky and the outcome is never guaranteed, often because much is at stake. Rhetoric and composition is meant to address and challenge prescribed, traditional, normative behaviors that are meant as tools of control and repression. Kaepernick is asking for America to use the power of patriotism for good and not as a weapon to disenfranchise and dispossess—that it should exemplify American exceptionalism in an inclusive rhetoric and ideal rather than as a tool of exclusion. The argument that Kaepernick has introduced could not have come at a more poignant time. The addition of protest rhetoric to the composition classroom engenders McComiskey's social process in a way that has the potential to not only be transformative, but essential in resisting tyranny in any form, large or small. The right to protest is one of our unalienable First Amendment rights as Americans and teaching our students to enact their rights is humanizing, if nothing else.

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. 1993, translated by Vadim Liapunov, edited by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist, U of Texas P, 2010.

Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." *College English*, vol. 50, no. 5,1988, pp. 477-94, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org.libproxy.csun.edu/stable/377477?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

Bloomfield, Brian P. and Bill Doolin. "Symbolic Communication in Public Protest over Genetic Modification: Visual Rhetoric, Symbolic Excess, and Social Mores." *Science Communication*, 2012, doi:1075547012469116

Bulmer, Sandy, and Margo Buchanan-Oliver. "Visual Rhetoric and Global Advertising Imagery." *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, pp. 49-61, doi:10.1080/13527260500289142

Endres, Danielle, and Samantha Senda-Cook. "Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 97, no. 3, 2011, pp. 257-282, doi:10.1080/00335630.2011.585167

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970, Continuum, 2000. selforganizedseminar.files.wordpress. com/2011/08/freire_pedagogy_oppresed1.pdf.

Gordon, Avery F. "The Bruise Blues." *Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited by Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin, Verso, 2017, pp. 195-205.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. Routledge, 2014.

Jensen, Richard J. "Evolving Protest Rhetoric: From the 1960s to the 1990s." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 20, no. 1/2, 2001, pp. 28-32, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/466132.

Kopper, Akos. "Why Guernica Became a Globally Used Icon of Political Protest? Analysis of its Visual Rhetoric and Capacity to Link Distinct Events of Protests into a Grand Narrative." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2014, pp. 443-57, doi:10.1007/s10767-014-9176-9

Lyons, Scott Richard. *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.

McComiskey, Bruce. *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*. Utah State UP, 2000.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. The Humanities P, 1962.

Sommers, Nancy, and Laura Saltz. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year." *College Composition and Communication*, 2004, pp.124-149, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4140684.

Wagoner, Nick. "Colin Kaepernick Takes Knee for Anthem; Joined by Teammate Eric Reid." *ESPN.com*, 2 Sept. 2016, www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/17444691/colin-kaepernick-san-francisco-49ers-sits-again-national-anthem.

Witz, Billy. "This Time, Colin Kaepernick Takes a Stand by Kneeling." *The New York Times*, 1 Sept. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/09/02/sports/football/colin-kaepernick-kneels-national-anthem-protest.html.

Wyche, Steve. "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat During National Anthem." *NFL.com*, 27 Aug. 2016, www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem.

A.G. Hughes

"CHEAP AND CONTENTED LABOR"

SINCLAIR LEWIS, IRONY, AND THE MARION MASSACRE

The organized labor movement in 1934 featured workers from textile mills throughout the American South striking in the face of unbearable conditions and pay. A 1995 documentary film directed by Judith Helfand and George Stoney may have reinvigorated some interest in the movement, commonly referred to as "The Uprising of '34," and an article by Dana Cloud describes oppression of black workers who were relegated to a "rhetoric of silence" by textile mill labor practices during the strikes ("Null Persona" 178). While her suggestion that a "null persona" can be brought into being by such activities is an intriguing one, I am much more interested in the rhetorical strategies this movement used to gain momentum. Cloud later described how further analysis of such a labor movement will illuminate the concept of power in a modern economy ("Laboring Under"). With this essay, I hope to add to Cloud's work on the movement while simultaneously prompting future inquiry.

While the Southern labor movements in textiles and other industries may at first seem to have dissipated as the twenty-first century approached, the opposition to workers unions persists. At a Volkswagen automobile manufacturing plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, workers voted in February 2014 to reject unionization as members of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) organization. Some employees noted that they were happy with conditions and compensation and therefore forming a union would serve no purpose. Nevertheless, the strong criticism of unions from select Tennessee politicians—including the governor and a U.S. senator—harkened back to anti-union sentiments of the early twentieth-century American South (Greenhouse). The Southern labor movement is a broad one, tied to the geopolitical landscape of the nation and born from the post-Civil War reconstruction era.

Contextually, the Great Depression's effect on the early twentieth century movement cannot be overlooked, nor can its placement between the world's two great wars. However, particularly important to the study of this labor movement is the year 1929, when many early strikes occurred in Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina ("The 1929 Marion textile strike"). One such event, which ended with a sheriff and his deputies shooting strikers, was depicted in a pamphlet published in the same year by the United Textile Workers of America (UTW) and the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL). Written by Sinclair Lewis, *Cheap and Contented Labor: The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929* provides a more in-depth (and critical) recounting of the deadly 1929 strike at Marion Manufacturing, a textile mill in Marion, NC.

Since Socrates's early use to critique the Sophists, irony has been tied to social critique and identification. Although the term becomes muddled with Aristotle's description of irony as for the ironist's amusement, and later use of the term to describe dramatic irony, its primary function is to act as a counter rhetoric which promotes an alternate perspective and critiques the status quo. This, I suggest, is a transhistorical definition for irony, digesting (and perhaps even supplanting) all ancient and modern theorizations.

By using irony in his pamphlet, Lewis invites the reader to complete an enthymeme with a clause supportive of the strikers. Additionally, the pamphlet uses synecdoche to generalize from the Marion community to towns throughout the South. Finally, Lewis gives his own satirical analysis of a pamphlet issued by the Kiwanis Club of Marion. This tactic contrasts his earlier ironic description of Marion workers'

dismal existence with the town establishment's outreach to industry and illustrations of prosperity. In this essay, I describe how Lewis's use of irony helped develop the movement from an early event to the larger strike across the region. Put specifically, my paper refers to Wayne Booth's conceptualization of irony and the Augustan era ideas about praise and blame described by Norman Knox and Allan B. Karstetter to analyze how Lewis uses irony to critique the status quo in Marion and therefore inequality and abuse of labor in mill towns throughout the South.

The Marion Massacre

Marion, situated at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina, still retains its distinctive small-town character in the 21st century. In his pamphlet, Lewis includes a vivid description of the Marion landscape in 1929:

> From the court house in which the Sheriff and his deputies were on trial there is a view which recalls Italy. If you disregard a few littered backyards in the foreground, you can lose yourself in that smiling vista of hills and valleys, with a distant group of houses that are obviously plaster Italian villas. Well, they aren't. They are houses in the East Marion mill village and seen closer, they are atrocious. (17)

At this point in the union movement, many textile operations in the Northeastern U.S. had begun to move towards the South in search of "cheap and contented labor" (Young). The "New" South continued to evolve and industrialize, and the mountaineers and farmers of McDowell and surrounding counties began to seek work at textile mills. As Cloud described, racial tensions were still a significant issue around these communities ("Null Persona"). The New South was moving forward in terms of industrialization, but still tied to old perspectives on race (Garrett-Scott 141).

Mill villages sprung up in towns with textile mills. These densely-populated communities stood in stark juxtaposition to the preceding farming societies spread out across counties. As Lewis notes, mill houses are not prime real estate. A short trip south on US-221 from Marion takes visitors by similar villages in Rutherford County and into South Carolina. Houses of these villages were regularly owned by the mill. Company stores within the communities deducted the cost of any purchases from workers' pay (Lawing; Strickland). Without being able to experience 1929 life in these villages, merely visiting the still-standing, post-outsourcing, neighborhood remnants elicits a sense of community life both at home and at the nearby mill.

The act of unionization implies a *we/us* group that stands in opposition to the them. It takes little effort to see negotiations between union leaders and mill administration as the site of political struggle. A union serves to negotiate for the benefit of its working-class members, and as discussed above it seems many of the company tactics used to create a collective workforce (shared villages, stores, work) create bonds that can be utilized by workers when unionizing. When negotiations failed, unions resorted to labor strikes to pressure mill operators and owners to act.

In response to poor working conditions and compensation, the Marion workers (guided by the UTW) unionized in May during meetings at the McDowell County courthouse. The larger Marion community was divided over the issue of union membership and tensions escalated between union members and mill administrators as the summer progressed. On October 2, after four months of strike activities, Sheriff Oscar Adkins, six of his deputies, and seven additional men deployed tear gas and shot into the crowd of around 600 picketers outside the mill. Six workers died as result of the violence, and the events garnered national media coverage ("The 1929 Marion textile strike"; Young).

No church in town would host funerals for the dead, so these were held outside. The churches were an important institution which served the town's ruling gentry rather than the laborers, who had descended from the dispossessed mountain farming class. Many other union members lost their jobs and

were subsequently kicked out of mill village housing ("The 1929 Marion textile strike"; Young). Lewis's pamphlet solicited donations from Northerners for strike relief during this period. In his book on the massacre, Mike Lawing describes how a significant number of strikers later distanced themselves from the union. The massacre at Marion Manufacturing faded into history, forgotten by even the local people.

Nearly a century later, Lewis's pamphlet stands as one of few reminders that these events took place. It consists of what he calls a "revision and extension" of six articles earlier written and published in the Scripps-Howard newspapers, alongside several black and white photos and a cover illustration. From the first few words of the introduction (and even the title), Lewis's use of irony is apparent: "This account of industrial justice in America today" (3). This rhetorical strategy appears throughout the pamphlet, but it is often complimented with sincere remarks on the social ills of Southern textile mill communities.

Irony & Identification

Before any further analysis of the pamphlet, a framework for understanding irony is necessary. For Plato, *eiron* was used as a "term of rebuke," referencing the "disassembler, [or] pretender" (Swearingen 73). Irony was then tied more to *doxa*, and other concepts such as *poiesis* (to make), *pseudo* (falseness), and *apate* (deception), than *logos* (Swearingen). As such, Plato uses the term pejoratively even though his Socrates appears as a type of ironist when he appropriates the Sophists' argument to demonstrate his superior wisdom. As Søren Kierkegaard (1841/1989) wrote, "the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates" (9).

Alternatively, Aristotle finds irony convenient for talking to the ignorant and as a practice of understatement opposed to buffoonery and overstatement. In a discussion of jokes from his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle remarks, "Irony is a more suitable style for civilized people than clowning, since someone who is ironic is making the joke to his own standard, while someone who is clownish is making it to that of someone else" (283). Regardless of form, this endorsement deviates from Plato's consideration of the ironist: "morally and intellectually corrupt because of this infidelity to truth," according to C. Jan Swearingen (130). Swearingen describes modern understanding of irony ("sometimes verbal technique, sometimes an act of deceit, sometimes an effective strategy, and sometimes a situation in which an unnamed 'fate' is the agent of reversal") as indebted to the writings attributed to Aristotle (Swearingen 130). Although Aristotle provides an aristocratic notion of irony and its use in rhetoric, he adds to the conceptualization of Plato's Socrates by describing a concealed humor provided by the use of irony as opposed to mere clownery. These classical conceptions imply an authorship at the core of irony, which defies contemporary use of the term as a synonym for coincidence, or to describe literary technique.

In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Wayne Booth asserted that the concept can only be vaguely defined. This sentiment is also held by other modern scholars (Enright; Barbe), including D.C. Muecke who wrote, "The art of irony is the art of saying something without really saying it" (5). Booth suggested that despite others' claims, everything cannot be described as ironic because that would weaken the term's use in rhetorical criticism. What Booth referred to as "stable irony," or irony with a simple, single level of reconstruction and no further requirements for analysis by the reader, is the type of irony I will be discussing in this essay. Early in his book, Booth referenced Kenneth Burke's suggestion that "we cannot use language maturely until we are spontaneously at home in irony" (12). This notion suggests the ability to comprehend and produce irony is crucial to mastering language.

Booth suggested four characteristics of stable ironies: (1) authorial intension, (2) concealment, (3) stability, and (4) finiteness. Regarding intent, he wrote "they are not mere openings, provided unconsciously, or accidental statements allowing the confirmed pursuer of ironies to read them as reflections against the author" (5). For Booth, the author is a key player in the formation of ironies, and a statement can only be ironic if the author intended it to be perceived as such. Additionally, the true

meaning of an irony is concealed beneath the literal surface of a statement (e.g. if one were to state, "it's so hot outside," during a January snowfall, the true meaning beneath such an overt statement is that it is in fact very cold out). Muecke describes the overt and covert meanings as layers of an irony in opposition with one another. Stable ironies are in fact "stable" according to Booth. Put another way, he claims that the meaning intended is fixed by the author and that any further unsolicited interpretation by the reader may cause the stable irony to become unstable. Finally, Booth suggested that the uncovered meanings of ironies are finite or related to the original literal statements.

In addition to his description of these characteristics, Booth also described the reconstruction process that the auditor of ironies undergoes to discern the true meaning of such statements. It is important to note that he asserted we often misread irony, but the reconstruction process includes four stages: (1) rejection of the overt, (2) an examination of possible other explanations, (3) an assumption about the author, and (4) deciding on the new meaning (10-11).

Such an intricate process implies that interaction between auditor and author is crucial to the success of irony. From its origins in the Socratic dialogues to current day actualizations in satirical news commentary, irony has had an interesting interaction with the concept of identification. This positive affect of irony has immense value when considering perhaps an argument for social change that would follow identification. David Kaufer notes that an author uses irony to create a relationship with an audience, and that use of irony can help in-groups reinforce their values and unite against a common foe. He writes, "those with whom he shares his irony are his confederates, those with whom he does not share it are his victims" (95). Booth also suggested that the successful interpretation of irony creates a unique relationship and contributes to identification: "The author I infer behind the false words is my kind of man, because he enjoys playing with irony, because he assumes my capacity with dealing with it, and—most important—because he grants me a kind of wisdom; he assumes that he does not have to spell out the shared and secret truths on which my reconstruction is to be built" (28). I find such "shared and secret truths" to be key elements in irony as a rhetorical strategy.

Lewis the Social Critic

Since Booth put so much emphasis on authorial intent and beliefs, some information on Lewis is necessary to arrive at an assumption about his views regarding capitalism and labor. By examining his use of irony here in a work of non-fiction, I suggest that Lewis used irony to fan the flame of a small-town massacre into the bonfire of a national labor uprising.

Nearly a century later, it seems impossible on a contemporary level to grasp adequately the context of 1929 (Herbert Hoover, the stock market crash, the first Academy Awards, Prohibition, the end of the Roaring Twenties, and the start of the Great Depression) (Lawing). A satirist in his novels, Lewis appears the paragon of the social critique genre during this era, tackling the issues of small-town life, and at times concerned with economic injustice. In *Main Street* (originally published in 1920) Lewis focuses on tension between a progressive main character and the tradition-focused townsfolk she finds herself living amongst. For part of the novel's epigraph, Lewis writes, "The town is, in our tale, called 'Gopher Prairie, Minnesota.' But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina hills" (6). As noted by Lawing, Lewis daftly critiqued American hypocrisy in this novel and the subsequent *Babbitt*, published in 1922. Because of this work, he became more popular than many other writers of the decade and he was the first American winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Knowing these details regarding Lewis's stance on the labor movement, a rhetorical analysis can successfully complete the ironic enthymemes throughout this short pamphlet. In fact, Marion becomes

a non-fiction analogue to those small towns characterized in Lewis's novels, and many of its residents the real versions of his regressive characters. Additionally, sincere statements throughout are easily discerned from the ironic and announce Lewis's true intentions. To provide this analysis with a level of hindsight, it is important to consider the final paragraph of the pamphlet:

> To such an open declaration by the Marion business men that they will assist Capital to choke Labor, can there, on the part of workers, be any conceivable answer save the most militant and universal and immediate organization of trade unions? Can there be any conceivable policy for neutrals save hearty assistance to that labor organization with sympathy, with pen, and with money? "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." (32)

In this call to action, Lewis not only asks fellow Northerners to lend their support to the Southern union struggle but also makes a final connection between this movement and the values of President Abraham Lincoln, the last sentence a quote of the president as he referred to a divided United States before the Civil War. Lewis believed that a new type of slavery had arisen in the New South, but this abomination was not concerned with skin color as much as class. He was a literary activist concerned with rural America's discontents, and readers in 1929 would have been aware of this when reading the pamphlet.

Praise⬌Blame

Richard Rorty juxtaposes a final vocabulary of society and a vocabulary to which the ironist aspires. He writes, "An ironist cannot get along without the contrast between the final vocabulary she inherited and the one she is trying to create for herself. Irony is, if not intrinsically resentful, at least reactive. Ironists have to have something to have doubts about, something from which to be alienated" (88). Such description places the ironist in a position where she is always reacting and critiquing the external society. Irony sits opposite a certain status quo or "common sense" (Rorty 74). How does this critique function? Rorty notes a vocabulary is used to critique another vocabulary, as a culture is used to critique another culture (80). This tends to cause friction between the ironist and her victim.

For example, in an early period of the women's rights movement, irony was used to convey a covert message that women are intelligent and able to reason via an overt vocabulary that may be interpreted as in support of the status quo. Elizabeth Galewski described how Judith Sargent Murray used irony in "On the Equality of the Sexes," claiming "the variety of fashions" and women's "talent for slander" implies woman's ability to reason. Clearly there are many other arguments for why women should be provided education, but these frivolous attributes are taken by Sargent Murray and made to serve a new purpose. She suggests the ability to reason would be better used by women if they are provided with an education.

Knox describes how works of the Augustan era suggest how a rhetor may become an ironist either by overtly praising those she intends to covertly blame or by overtly blaming those she intends to covertly praise. This tactic, which functions by exaggerating the inappropriateness of the ironist's mismatched statement, appears to be useful in critical irony, where a judgment is to be made on the parties in question. Karstetter describes these two tactics as such: (1) "Praising something for what it isn't," and (2) "Praising the reprehensible for what it is" (168). For example, the clever ironist may stumble upon a situation where two business partners are having a dispute over profit share. One partner is greedy and contributes little to the business operations, while the other has previously given up earnings to the other and stays busy with day-to-day operations. Considering values of altruism (and being presented with only the narrative provided), the ironist arbitrator could offer her ruling on the dispute by praising the first partner's greed and small contributions, then blaming the second partner's willingness to compromise in the past and daily efforts in business operations. Such a gesture does not at first make overt sense and must be reconstructed to show the ironist's true intention to side with the second partner. With this framework in mind, I will now discuss several passages that blame to ironically praise the Marion labor.

Blaming Marion Labor

Lewis begins his ironic blaming of labor in the introduction to the pamphlet: "Early in 1929 there was trouble at these mills. Three or four malicious workers said that wages just above the starving line were not enough" (5). The word "malicious" here stands out, because it makes this phrase ironic. Use of this adjective to describe the workers immediately after noting the "trouble" at the Marion mills suggests that the blame be placed on labor for the ensuing tragedy. Why? Because these "malicious" workers were not happy with wages that kept their bellies just full enough to work in the mill. From a brief description of Lewis's values, the reader can determine that in fact Lewis does not blame the worker and is instead critiquing those who have done so. This phrase therefore serves to praise labor.

Another section works similarly: "Since the first strike at Marion, these six hundred are working only fifty-five hours a week, but in the good old days, before agitators came to disturb the peace of this idyllic village, they worked twelve hours a day or twelve hours a night, and had no time to think about such un-American ideas as how to get more than $13 a week" (17-18). This section swaps "malicious" with "un-American" and suggests that the unionizing worker is opposing nationalist sentiment in favor of personal gain. But by noting that the gain would be up from a measly $13 per week, Lewis guides the reader to a covert meaning: that uniting for better pay and working conditions are in fact NOT "un-American."

The passage also suggests, like many others in the pamphlet, that outsiders were harming Marion by interrupting the "peace." Lewis was himself one of these outsiders, and he suggests in another section that the South must accept both foreign agitators along with foreign capital. The truth Lewis hopes to illuminate is that there was no "peace" before Marion workers formed a union, but merely oppression and poor working conditions. Additionally, the pamphlet is aimed at a Northern audience, and with the goal of raising donations, it would not be wise to make a statement criticizing the efforts of Northerners, unless it is an ironic one. This focus on the foreign "agitator" is a technique Lewis uses to address his audience.

Lewis's concern with foreignness appears in another section as well, but it works ironically in a different way: "This man's name is Dan Elliott. I have already referred to him as one of the strike leaders who discovered striking even before the 'foreign' agitators came in. I hope he will leave Marion immediately. Marion is not a very healthy place for men with such foreign and Bolshevik names as Dan Elliott" (16). Dan Elliott is one of the Marion workers Lewis describes as forming and leading the local union with support from the UTW. Here Lewis critiques Elliott for his foreignness and even makes use of quotation marks to denote the word "foreign" in his description of the man. By doing so, Lewis is making an attack at those who suggest it was not Marion workers who caused the conflict, but agents of organizations like the UTW. The covert meaning here is that Elliott is not a foreign name, nor a Bolshevik one, and that Dan Elliott is at home in Marion and a significant figure in the local union.

Praising Mill Management and Capitalism

In contrast to blaming labor, Lewis praises mill management throughout the pamphlet to expose and blame its hypocrisy. Writing of Tilden Lee Carver, one of the men wounded in the shootout who died in the hospital, Lewis takes on a dark tone: "He is dead now. He is one problem that we need not solve in Marion. Isn't it unfortunate that the nimble guns of the sheriff's deputies did not get all of those misplaced 600 who work for the Marion Manufacturing Co.! Then, like Mr. Carver, they would none of them have any more problems" (7). This dark irony overtly praises the actions of law enforcement and suggests death for the problems/workers of Marion, while covertly critiquing such ideas that favor capitalism. While Carver in death was indeed no longer concerned with the labor dispute, Lewis covertly laments the man's death.

Another example of blaming by praising can be found in his description of the Marion Manufacturing Co. mill:

> But, going out the two miles, you come to East Marion and to the mill of the Marion Manufacturing Co., which makes plain white cotton cloth, the sort of cloth that is used in cheap pillowcases. The mill is the centre of the village, and to its six hundred employees it is the most interesting thing to be seen. Its clamorous shuttles, its dirty floors, its roar and utter ghastly fatigue take the place, for some six hundred men, women and children, of the quiet mountain glens from which our civilization has rescued them. (17)

This passage functions ironically in two ways. First, Lewis suggests that the toil of the Marion worker is merely for cheap pillowcases, and that the mill is loud, "dirty," and tiring. These all could be sincere statements by Lewis, but his suggestion that this life is a rescue for the workers (old and young) from peaceful mountain lives makes the section ironic. The covert meaning is the notion that life before in those mountain glens was much better than that experienced by the Marion workers in the mill. This section is a compact example of the larger pamphlet, which uses sincere and ironic phrases to complement one another and make strides towards Lewis's end goal. In addition, this section blames by praising not only mill management, but also the larger capitalist system that has overthrown the Southern rural agrarian lifestyle. Lewis notes his place as among the perpetrators of this degradation when he suggests "our civilization" is what caused the movement. His place as a member of the gentry allows him to critique his own destructive culture.

Another section summarizing the living conditions in the East Marion mill village works towards the same point: "This packing box on stilts above a welter of red clay is the refuge, the castle, the whole home of most of these workmen at Marion. It is their reward for their work of ten or twelve hours a day. It is the way in which we teach them that in this country the results of honest labor are a splendor unlike that of the hovels of the Old World" (19).

Here, the sincere statement made by Lewis is his metaphor used to describe the mill village house as a "packing box on stilts." This description interacts ironically with a description of such a building as a "refuge," "castle," or "whole home." Lewis then goes on to ascribe nationalist sentiment to harsh labor and the "splendor" of the mill house, just as an activist may suggest "it is American" to own guns. In conjunction with his harsh critique of the houses, this phrase becomes ironic. Again, Lewis notes that it is "we" that lead the worker into this role, critiquing not only mill management, but also the larger system in which he is implicated.

Satirizing the Marion Kiwanis Pamphlet

In the last section of his pamphlet, Lewis turns his attentions to a publication from the Marion Kiwanis club, which served to solicit investment from industry in McDowell County. Several passages from the publication did not frame the town to Lewis's standards and he gives some commentary. The first described here is a section that details the lives of children in Marion, with the Kiwanis statement in quotations and Lewis's critique in parentheses:

> "And for children, Marion is an ideal happy home town, with a fairyland around it in which they may frolic and grow sturdier through all seasons of the year."
> (Happy fairyland, where an eight-year-old girl frolics on bare sun-bitten red clay, after only seven or eight hours a day of washing, combing, feeding, quieting her four smaller brothers and sisters, with no older person there to help. Happy Kiwanians, dreamers and poets of the Vital Urge!). (30)

Again, Lewis uses sincere phrases to add to an ironic statement, writing in parentheses of the true experience of a Marion youth in opposition with the Kiwanis vision. Lewis suggests a "Mud Fairyland,"

which appears to be an oxymoronic and ironic phrase. The covert ridicule here is of the Kiwanis false depiction of Marion.

In another significant critique, Lewis analyzes how the Kiwanis of Marion describe labor. This section is included with the Kiwanis statement in quotations and Lewis's emphasis added and critique in parentheses:

> "Labor in McDowell county is plentiful and willing, and of a most intelligent, loyal and desirable kind. *Under no more than reasonably fair treatment of its help*, every factory or branch of industry is certain to be able to secure adequate, satisfactory and contented labor."
>
> (Was there ever a more extraordinary expression of Marionian and Kiwanian ideals than that "no more than REASONABLY fair treatment"?) (31)

Likely the genesis for Lewis's pamphlet title, this section of the Kiwanis publication is ostensibly aimed at industry representatives and their goals. Lewis deftly critiques the phrase "no more than reasonably fair treatment" as characteristic of the Marion establishment which seeks to invite foreign capital but not foreign "agitators." Such a statement is nearly treasonous to the people of McDowell County.

Marion as an Example

Finally, I wish to critique how Lewis uses Marion as an example for the labor struggle throughout not only the South, but the entire nation. He acknowledges a deficiency here, writing:

> There is one unfairness in this pamphlet—it too much emphasizes one town. Marion is as barbarous as I say, but there are scores of mill towns quite as bad, and not only in North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama, but in virile Maine, pure Massachusetts, and the sacred Middle West. But in the South the misery is a little newer, less established, easier to attack. (3)

Although Lewis suggests he focused a bit too much on Marion due to time limitations, he also implicates the town as representative of mill towns throughout the nation. Lewis uses Marion as an exaggerated characterization of the average mill town of the era. However, Marion would not have been known to him if it weren't for the violent shoot out. Lewis overgeneralizes to describe the conditions of other Southern textile mill towns as like Marion's, despite providing little evidence of similar "barbaric" events.

Nevertheless, it works to Lewis's advantage to suggest that Marion is ordinary and like many other towns. This strategy works as a fear tactic, suggesting that Northern sympathizers should donate to stem the tide of abusive capitalism in American industry. Marion is simply the vicious example Lewis can present in aims of spurring action.

Conclusion

Early in this essay, I described my project as focused on Lewis's use of irony to critique the status quo in Marion and therefore inequality and abuse of labor in mill towns throughout the South. After analyzing his pamphlet, I suggest Lewis does so (1) through ironic identification, (2) by blaming labor and praising mill management and capitalism, (3) by pairing irony with sincerity, and (4) by using tragedy-stricken Marion as an example. After reading Lewis's detailed description of East Marion living conditions, I suggest future work on the Marion strike and surrounding events of the 1920s and 1930s may include a study of the mill village as a capitalist edifice created and controlled by management, but nevertheless the home of labor. This could provide insight into the privatization of public life, which occurs in online spaces of the 21st century (e.g. Facebook, Twitter).

I suggest that Lewis's character and motives allow for readers to identify with his values and critiques. These values are apparent when Lewis pairs sincere statements with ironic ones. By sharing these ironies

and "secret truths," Lewis makes his readers into confederates. Additionally, the praise by blame and blame by praise frameworks suggested by Karstetter are very helpful in this analysis, as nearly all of Lewis's ironies are directed at either the workers or industry. Furthermore, Marion is a prime site of critique by Lewis due to its recent tragedy and although his characterization of the town as normal is reprehensible, it serves well his purpose of eliciting donations for the UTW. Coming two centuries after Jonathan Swift's critique of 18th century inequality among the Irish in *A Modest Proposal*, Lewis's *Cheap and Contented Labor* demonstrates irony's lasting value in the rhetoric of social criticism.

Works Cited

Aristotle. "Rhetoric." *Gorgias and Rhetoric*. Translated by Joe Sachs, Focus, 2009.

Barbe, Katharina. *Irony in Context*. John Benjamins, 1995.

Booth, Wayne. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. U of Chicago P, 1974.

Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. U of California P, 1966.

Cloud, Dana. "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1999, pp. 177-209.

---. "Laboring Under the Sign of the New: Cultural Studies, Organizational Communication, and the Fallacy of the New Economy." *Management Communication Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2001, pp. 268-78.

Enright, D. J. *The Alluring Problem: An Essay on Irony*. Oxford UP, 1986.

Galewski, Elizabeth. "The Strange Case for Women's Capacity to Reason: Judith Sargent Murray's Use of Irony in 'On the Equality of the Sexes' (1790)." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 93, no. 1, 2007, pp. 84-108.

Garrett-Scott, Shennette. "'The Hope of the South': The New Century Cotton Mill of Dallas, Texas, and the Business of Race in the New South, 1902–1907." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, vol. 116, no. 2, 2012, pp. 138-66.

Greenhouse, Steven. "Volkswagen Vote is Defeat for Labor in South." *The New York Times*, 14 Feb. 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/02/15/business/volkswagen-workers-reject-forming-a-union.html. 16 Nov. 2017.

Karstetter, Allan B. "Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Irony." *Speech Monographs*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1964, pp. 162-78.

Kaufer, David. "Irony and Rhetorical Strategy." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1977, pp. 90-110.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*. 1841, Princeton UP, 1989.

Knox, Norman. *The Word Irony and Its Context, 1500-1755*. Duke UP, 1961.

Lawing, Mike. *The Marion Massacre*. Wasteland, 2004.

Lewis, Sinclair. *Cheap and Contented Labor; The Picture of a Southern Mill Town in 1929*. United Textile Workers of America, 1929.

---. *Main Street*. Signet Classics, 1961.

The Uprising of '34. Directed by Judith Helfand and George Stoney. Independent Television Service, 1995.

Muecke, D.C. *The Compass of Irony*. Methuen, 1969.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge UP, 1989.

Strickland, J.L. "A Natural-Born Linthead." *Southern Cultures*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2012, pp. 96-106.

Swearingen, C. Jan. *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies*. Oxford UP, 1991.

"The 1929 Marion Textile Strike." *McDowell County Oral History*, mcdowellhistory.com/2009/08/18/the-1929-marion-textile-strike/. 16 Nov. 2017.

Young, Perry Deane. "Reliving a Massacre: Remembering Our Ugly Labor History." *Independent Weekly*, 13 Apr. 2005, www.indyweek.com/indyweek/reliving-a-massacre/Content?oid=1194611. 16 Nov. 2017.

Lauren Liebow

"Hoeism"

Integrating the Narratives of Sex, Social Media, and Femininity into the Postmodern Tech Ecosystem

Originally intended for status updates and content sharing, social media often transcends into the storytelling realm. Twitter witnessed a narrative phenomenon of "hoe stories," featuring connected threads of tweets written by women, narrating outrageous stories about their own real-life sex scandals. In late 2015, Aziah King (Twitter handle @_zolarmoon) wrote 148 tweets in a sensational recount of her weekend exploits as a stripper. She spins a tall tale of prostitution, adventure, murder, attempted suicide, and broken friendship. The story hinges upon a chance meeting with another dancer at a Hooters restaurant, where she and another customer are "vibing over our hoeism or whatever," hoeism acting as the catalyst to this modern fable (King). The Twitter thread gained momentum and became wildly popular. Hoe stories like King's appear both on and off Twitter in various forms, and stories of a similar tenor echo the ones found on Twitter. Other women of color, such as Oloni, (Twitter handle @Oloni) post anonymous stories from their followers about blowjobs, car sex, and occasional incest. Women like Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj in the music industry also use sex to empower, rather than shame, other women.

Commonly accepted prerequisites of hoe stories dictate that they must come from a woman, and they must be true. Hoe stories represent a generational and cultural shift away from archaic values of modesty and repressed sexuality, empowering women to express themselves as sexual and creative beings. People depend on these women to produce content, online artwork, and creative material that transforms the purpose of the internet from pure utility to an artistic expression. However, the tech industry relentlessly denies women access to roles that would allow them to gain a relevant voice in the medium upon which their artwork relies. Women striving to gain sexual authority through social media consistently find themselves subjected to systematic oppression by a patriarchal hegemony that limits the control they have over a creative medium in their art. To achieve equality in this regard, women must contribute as much as men to constructing the language of the internet and technology. Indeed, though women gain autonomy through self-imposed, social-mediated sexualization and produce significant creative content on the internet, masculinity exerts almost universal control by dominating its coding and management, leaving women far from achieving parity in the posthuman sexual narrative genre.

Victorian literature transformed sex into a heavily guarded and cloistered topic. The era's social energy condemned women to a crushing silence on all subjects regarding sex and promiscuity, insisting women turn "away from [their] bodies" (Greenblatt 5). A woman's body represented sexuality by default. Worse, as Hélène Cixous notes, women were "shamefully taught to ignore [their bodies]… with that stupid sexual modesty" (Cixous 885). Although this social rigidity carried over multiple generations, a shift in cultural values recently allowed modern women on the internet to embrace and celebrate their sexuality. A product of the women's liberation movement rooted in the sexual revolution of the early 1970s, modern modes of online femininity offer signs of an updated revolution for social power. A movement originally catalyzed by the birth control pill, women gained contraceptive autonomy in the bedroom and could privately moderate their own bodies via reproduction. That same social movement has transformed into a demand for social authority and the elimination of the uniquely feminine shame associated with sex. Women empower one another through this movement to reject the shame that an overbearing patriarchy imposes upon their bodies by publicly claiming, and even broadcasting, sex online.

Through directly rejecting these Victorian norms of reserved femininity, hoe stories reverse the accepted roles of heteronormative sexual authority. These stories oppose the dominant and toxic sex culture created by and tailored to men. King's hoe story documents her first-person recount of serendipitously meeting another stripper at Hooters, spontaneously going to Florida with her, entangling herself in a prostitution ring, and finally fleeing from a murder scene after she witnesses an attempted suicide. Openness about sex work and King's willingness to claim her "hoeism" without a hint of inhibition or modesty characterize the narrative as a modern millennial oeuvre. Her openness recalls Cixous's distaste for anything less than the unadulterated feminine narrative: "[c]ensor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (880).

Cixous promotes this kind of openness and frank sexuality, often lauded in modern progressive feminism, yet not without particular retaliation from staunchly-third wave movements. The women who opposed the glass ceiling were not conscious of a need for the multiplicity currently afforded to women in social media spaces. Internet feminism leads and empowers the newest, fourth wave of feminism, pushing the boundaries of women-only spaces and the freedom to explore women-specific issues with one another and on the cusp of the rapidly evolving technological landscape. King's hoe story is remarkable because her sexualized content not only narrates, but also provides a feminine space on Twitter for women to undermine traditional patriarchal systems. She deconstructs the preexisting structures in sexual narratives to achieve a cultural power shift between men and women. Historically, "female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters," leading to a prevailing patriarchy in which women are a "prop for the enactment of man's fantasies" (Irigaray 25). However, King does not ascribe to Luce Irigaray's total rejection of heterosexual norms. Instead, she uses these structures to her advantage in an intentionally performative reversal of engendered sexual power. She recounts a certain technique she uses to get her boyfriend to do what she wants. He did not want her to go on the trip to Florida: "He was soooooo hurt… So I had to fuck him calm, & then I left" (King). King places her boyfriend's masculine authority in question, undermining his assumed patriarchal privilege. She essentially claims absolute power over the situation, and asserts herself as a rediscovered and dominant sexual woman in spite of her inherent disadvantage in such a rigidly phallocentric society.

The rest of King's notorious hoe story especially opposes the archaic constructs of sexual reserve by further publicizing everything that the surrounding social norms deem unacceptable. She seems entirely comfortable with casually tweeting to her sizable audience, "Ima full nude typa bitch," meaning that she prefers to dance at strip clubs entirely naked rather than inhibited by any clothing as certain strip clubs require (King). Rejecting the taboo against nudity, King shares this with her followers thereby implicitly proclaiming that the "personal is political" (Hanisch 1). Since sex work lends itself to a politicized vision of intimacy with the female body, King captures this skewed version of privacy in her well-documented Twitter thread. Calling herself a bitch in her own writing eliminates any residual shyness in her particular form of femininity; she denies power to the word itself, and instead publicly reclaims her personal feminine power. The public nature of hoe stories invokes a shift in the patriarchal paradigm by politicizing the sexual experience from a decidedly female perspective. King's refusal to shy away from the taboo parts of her story – and of her body – make her narrative particularly subversive to the dominant system.

Critics of this modern sexual agency claim that women subject themselves to an objectified realm, incapable of escaping the sexual responsibility of their own bodies. Too often both men and women find the topic of Twitter hoe stories abrasive and gratuitously sexual in nature. Current debate on the topic question whether the sexual content in feminine liberation narratives are necessary at all; would it not be easier to advocate for equality without discussing sex? However, assuming that women bear the burden of sexual responsibility is a critical mistake. Objectification is often transactional, mimicking a two-way

street. While the male gaze, as scholars like Laura Mulvey argue, traditionally views women as little more than mere images of ideation, sexual liberation and internet narratives give rise to a new feminine gaze, which deflects the unwanted attention of objectification back onto the oppressor. To access this empowered stance, women have taken charge and imposed their own feminine identities and sexual personhoods, bereft of the cumbersome sexual responsibility often attached to women by default. Hoe stories contribute to this discourse, acknowledge the nature of their oppression in order to exploit the system by which their narrators experience opposition. In particular, women of color face far more difficulties breaking their objectified status and their bodies' subjugation to an oppositional male gaze. By reclaiming and owning their sexualized status in the context of the oppositional gaze, women earn a credible voice in their own narratives, a particular agency that affords them an authoritative perspective on their experience.

Indeed, politicizing sex allows hoe stories to rewrite the traditional culture of shame surrounding sex. This flips our conventions of power and sex upside-down. It affords a newfound sense of sexual autonomy by dispelling old-fashioned values and eliminating the disadvantage women experience in this power structure. Although the theme of empowerment through sex manifests elsewhere in literature and film – from *Madame Bovary* and *The Awakening* to *Thelma and Louise* – Twitter breaks the mold by bringing the narrative one step closer to its audiences. Hoe stories are unique because of their proximity to reality and fewer levels of dissociation from their readers. The medium itself promotes interaction between reader and author, encouraging people to read and respond to narratives such as King's. Unlike a published autobiography, Twitter allows anyone to share stories and ideas online; anyone from rap artists to Hooters employees can write a story compelling enough to raise awareness or make their voices heard. This unique interconnectivity in hoe stories normalizes discussions about sex and creates an open, online environment for common values and cultural identity to evolve and progress.

In similar fashion to Cixous's "woman for women" argument, Carol Hanisch's "The Personal is Political" examines how individual, personal problems that women face are issues that other women share in common; women benefit from sharing and helping one another in these struggles. Many women behind Twitter's hoe stories interact with and respond to an audience of followers, allowing their readers to share opinions and advice with one another, free of the oppressive masculine voice prevalent for so long in the feminine narrative. Hanisch calls this "the pro-woman line," in which collaboration between women of any form assert power and establish a cohesive bond. Among women active on social media, this manifests in the form of trips to Florida and tweets that say "me too". Moreover, Hanisch contends that personal problems for women are also political problems, identifying the benefits of women bonding together and politicizing their movement towards equality. She insists that, "[a]t this point, 'personal problems'... are a form of political action," and by dissolving this dichotomy, women can speak and collaborate freely amongst one another as companions rather than competitors under the patriarchal regime. Hoe stories actualize Hanisch's ideal by bringing women together and politicizing their words in public tweets. In this respect, King's audience is just as responsible as King is for politicizing her personal space.

King's narrative promotes the politically-charged, sexually-liberated heart of feminism. Although historical feminist movements failed in many ways to recognize true intersectionality in their social theories, women like King open the spirit of sexual liberation feminism to a broader population. Because "women do not constitute, strictly speaking, a class, and their dispersion among several classes makes their political struggle complex, their demands are sometimes contradictory" (Irigaray 32). Modern feminists are hyper-aware that women face different struggles depending on the identities to which they ascribe, a concept that eluded many first-wave feminists during the fight for suffrage, which required consolidation to gain political power in numbers. Feminism thereafter rapidly accelerated away from a

dated model that only supported white women, and toward a forward-thinking digital age that promotes postmodern narrative structures, such as Twitter hoe stories.

Brittney Cooper is a prominent voice in the modern feminist movement, who supports and empowers the unclaimed frustration – indicative of unspoken rage – within minority women (specifically black women). In her debut book, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers her Superpower*, Cooper points to Beyoncé as a steward of intersectionality in digital age feminism. She argues that, not only does her intrinsic rage deserve a voice and an outlet of expression, but also that Beyoncé transformed feminism into "no longer something reserved for Black girls with college degrees and Ph.D's... Armed with the feminist narratives in the digital age, this Black girl [Beyoncé] who'd built a singing career instead of going to college could be a feminist, too" (Cooper 30). This broad brushstroke definition of feminism in the social media age relies upon sensationalism and digital marketing for the widespread success of the otherwise-longstanding movement. Cooper views the artist as a personal inspiration for her work in the field of feminism, and admires the effect that Beyoncé has had within, outside of, and around the feminist movement. Beyoncé opened the world of feminism to countless women, many of whom had little educational or formal training in the subject.

Similarly, King sensationalizes and opens the boundaries of feminism in a very similar way as Cooper describes Beyoncé to have done. Just as Beyoncé widened the label of feminism to a wider woman audience, King expands sexually liberating hoe stories to each of her followers, and then to each of their followers, via retweet. There is immense and hitherto-untapped power in the internet, which allows women of all classes and races to have a voice and gain popularity and social value through direct appeals to rapidly expanding audiences. Social media brings an accessible mode of communication to a wider population than any other mode of publication. By opening the world to such communication, online feminism grows increasingly more intersectional.

King's story is far from glamorous; she writes as a black woman about being a stripper. Feminism in her story is not the same detached feminism used by white women, nor by the women in academia. It is a far more accessible, candid source of feminism for the masses. King uses Twitter to engage with an audience that can relate with her thoughts and actions. Twitter, as a medium for her storytelling, provides access to other women who understand and want to listen. With such a wide variety of newly emerging feminine identities, "[w]e need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (Western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly construed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities" (Scott 33). The future of online feminism would be remiss to ignore the narratives from Black, Latina, Asian, lesbian, and transgender feminine identities atypical of the cisgender, white trope so dominant in earlier waves of feminism.

Of course, the intersectional and interactive aura of hoe stories is not unique to Twitter. Women across different social media platforms and in different forms of art have recently embraced a new sense of publicized liberty through sex. The scope of feminine public sexuality spans a variety of "specific 'texts' – not only books and documents but also utterances of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices" (Scott 35). Evident from women in the rap industry to popular YouTube porn star vloggers, women explicitly and publicly write their bodies and bring women into the center of focus – transforming into the subject rather than merely an object. Minaj charges the cultural shift toward a sexually positive culture, empowering women for the natural state of their bodies rather than shaming them for their sexuality. Although the discourse on feminine nudity as an unnecessarily sexualized image empowers women to embrace their bodies as vehicles of mind and soul, rather than for their sexual value, sex-charged rap artist Minaj takes an essentially different approach. Women of color face far more difficulties in escaping the sexualized image imposed by the lingering male gaze. Non-

white women suffer from an astounding lack of privilege, and therefore less autonomy to define their own bodies along their own terms. In retaliation, rap queens like Minaj take back their own image and transform the dialogue surrounding sex into a positive force of pleasure and freedom rather than a source of antiquated shame. Free to proclaim the wants and whims of her body, the liberated internet woman "will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her" (Cixous 886). Hoe stories and their music industry counterparts work together to reclaim the woman's body for herself.

As models of feminist theory, hoe stories and other feminine sex media serve an important function as cultural artifacts. King's narrative went viral and exploded beyond the boundaries of Twitter within a matter of hours after she posted the first tweet. Spreading anything virally requires a catalyzing "share" button; as Marshall McLuhan asserts in the first chapters of *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, the medium of the story is just as important as the story's message and popularity. McLuhan repeats "[p]rinting, a ditto device" on two full-page spreads of *The Medium is the Message*, thereby speaking to and emphasizing the undeniable commodification of the standardizing modes of narrative and typographical production – which, from a structuralist perspective, merely exist as extensions of a particular idea – or referent. As if channeling Walter Benjamin, McLuhan attributes printing with "detachment, non-involvement." Of course, when applied to the internet, the ditto device transforms into the "share" button available on nearly every social media post. Hence, the Twitter-specific equivalent is the re-tweet. These mechanisms are, in fact, selective ditto devices, designed to share, yet also to attach a persona with the content. Dittoing a work and sharing it with friends on social media involves a degree of attachment while encouraging discussion and interaction with the medium, itself. Hoe stories place the familiar form of narrative found in the novel under close scrutiny and deconstruct it with a postmodern renovation. They represent a new form of social media storytelling, and ultimately challenge the predominant methods and means in the existing medium of narration.

However, the re-tweet function remains part of the stiflingly masculine Twitter structure. Although hoe stories afford women sexual agency, the four founders who ultimately created Twitter were all men. As the company expanded, Twitter represented the rest of the tech industry's demographics: young men. They wrote the code, designed the application, and created the platform with very little input or authorship from women. While these superstructures affect the superficial interface and stylistic preferences, they simultaneously create a restricting sense of normativity within a binding system with which women must conform. Indeed, for the most part, too few women have a viable voice in the operating systems of the internet. Using a male-dominated medium reinforces societal implications that women must fit the roles that men prescribe for them, and that any deviation from this norm poses a threat to extant norms and values.

Though many women tend to use social media to gain influence and popularity, it is far from the ideal medium for doing so. Although it represents a globalized space that allows women to share hoe stories, sex tapes, and music lyrics that afford sexual liberty and autonomy, only men develop the language and code that powers social media. In the bent language of Cixous, every woman must "[code] yourself. Your body must be heard. By [coding] her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her" (880). McLuhan notably insists that a message's medium is as important, if not more important, than the message itself. Arguing from a decidedly posthuman position, McLuhan assesses the extension of self and the way people express themselves by manipulating media. According to him, the people who create the language used to describe a medium exercise power over it – and those who use it.

Although King's narrative fuels feminine sexual authority, Twitter itself is a decidedly patriarchal and misogynistic medium. The majority of Twitter employees and the leadership are almost all men. McLuhan's examination of identity in such a manipulated space as the internet subsequently blurs lines

between the personal and political spheres of feminine existence explored by Carol Hanisch. McLuhan examines the discord in the "Age of Anxiety" that conflicting agendas in the electric age caused. Many people, both men and women, consider such openly gendered writing about "private" sex lives on the internet entirely too explicit, thereby failing to see it as a means of reinstating feminine power over what has been, for far too long, a male-dominated and controlled narrative form. Consequently, despite their subversive characteristics, hoe stories will remain subject to patriarchal privilege so long as men control the medium. Indeed, as McLuhan insists, the medium is essential to the message; therefore, women will never exercise true control over their own online sexual narratives until they achieve more significant power in the tech industry and can control and create technology at the same rate as men. Despite the impulse to laud women for breaking into the masculine sphere of publicizing sex, masculine control still dominates and overwhelms the medium and, therefore, women remain far away from achieving parity in posthuman sexual narrative.

David Fincher's 2010 film *The Social Network* traced the origins of social media giant, Facebook, via Mark Zuckerberg's rapid ascension into the tech industry's league of untouchables. Hobson notes that the film notably portrays women as little more than a "muse" for the men who write the code of cutting-edge technology, or simply the target of "chauvinistic rage and embitterment" (Hobson 126). Zuckerberg's character in the film (played by Jesse Eisenberg) as well as his current role in the tech industry, perpetuate a patriarchal standard of dominance. Facebook once started out as "Facesmash," a way for men to objectively rate how attractive the women of Harvard's undergraduate class appeared, based on stolen online photos. The dramatized origins story of "Facesmash" features "a world of Ivy League computer geeks that excludes women," entirely indicative of the harsh reality in the tech industry. "*The Social Network* mobilized routine techno-cultural practices of linguistic and visual subjugation of women's bodies to frame men's innovative engagements with technology" (Hobson 126).

The digital revolution is built upon the backs of women's bodies; yet, women receive almost none of the credit or recognition for the work they contribute. Carolyn Cunningham, among other feminist technology theorists, identifies the root of the problem in the fact that "women continue to be consumers, rather than producers, of innovations that have the power to shape gender ideologies." Unsurprisingly, a tech industry defined by passive misogyny will inevitably lead to an oppressively patriarchal posthuman society. However, hoe stories on Twitter and modes of feminine sexual autonomy via rap music and popular culture offer a unique form of resistance literature that capitalizes on feminine sexuality to reclaim freedom and establish a foothold in the masculine sphere of normalized public sexuality. Ana Donaldson's study in the *Journal of Visual Literacy* offers an in-depth analysis of feminine identities in today's increasingly technological society, and expands upon Cunningham's observations of the tech world. Most importantly, she calls for an exclusively feminine computational language in the modern tech world. Donaldson identifies masculine dominance in all aspects of the tech industry, from corporate leadership to web developers and coders, and points out the flaws in permitting the industry to remain exclusively misogynistic.

For women to express themselves completely, unadulterated by patriarchal dominance, women must write the code (as in computer code along with the implicit rules of social media) alongside men. Women should write the stories as well as control the medium of those stories. The male-crafted language of social media is exclusive, but emerging sexual womanhood and autonomy threatens to deconstruct this power structure. By politicizing hoe stories and shedding sexual shame, women successfully undermine patriarchal hegemony. However, women must also write the discourse and assert power over the medium of the internet to fully actualize this liberation movement.

Along the same lines as Hanisch, Ti-Grace Atkinson addresses the personally political nature of radical feminism in a postmodern world. Concerning the future of women's representation in marginalized

spaces, she boldly declares:

> [h]ere are our options: (1) we can limit our goals to advance a FEW women up into whatever existing systems we happen to find ourselves in; or (2) we must understand and prepare ourselves for not only turning the world upside down but—more importantly—inside out. All social relations are at bottom political ones. They CAN be changed. But it will be much harder than the Women's Movement of ANY 'wave' has indicated it appreciates.

In this fashion, Atkinson highlights the tech industry's current – and likely sustained – male dominance in a technologically dependent world. Ultimately, her research concludes, women will never achieve equality until women and men contribute equally to the language of the internet and technology.

Women like Aziah King open the door to opportunities for other women. Whether by empowering selfhood and sexual identity, or indirectly attacking the misogynistic hold over the tech industry, women must assert their inherent feminine power. This power lies dormant within so many women across the world, often overlooked by the institutional patriarchy. Oscar-nominated movie director Ava DuVernay insists, "[t]here's so much untapped talent in the hood." This untapped talent suggests narratives of womanhood and sex reach beyond their feminist undertones. The intersectional nature of hoe stories' version of internet feminism marks an important deviation from the heretofore (and increasingly) monotonous discourse of white women in the political and economic marketplace. Although far from achieving total parity, hoe stories and politicizing sexuality through culture bring all of us a step closer to a functional relationship with intersectional humanities and the budding technology industry. Hoe stories on Twitter offer just one example of many liberating institutions of femininity; they are the result of an underlying cultural shift away from the stiff intolerance of sex. The women behind this social energy shift are champions of equality and models of political sexuality. These hoe story writers are a menace to the patriarchal establishment under which we numbly operate.

_____

Works Cited

Atkinson, Ti-Grace. "The Descent from Radical Feminism to Postmodernism." *A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the Late 1960s and the Early 1970s*. Boston, 29 Mar. 2014. Web. 4 Apr. 2017.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-93, *JSTOR*.

Cooper, Brittney C. *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*. St. Martin's Press, 2018.

Cunningham, Carolyn M. "Men Are Like Bluetooth, Women Are Like Wi-Fi: What Feminist Technology Studies Can Add to the Study of Information and Communication Technologies." *Northwest Journal of Communication*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 7-21, *EBSCOhost*.

Donaldson, J. Ana. "The Cyber-Goddess: Women and Technology." *Journal of Visual Literacy*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2000, pp. 31-38, *EBSCOhost*.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. Verso, 2015.

Greenblatt, Stephen Jay. Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England. U of California P, 2006. *Google Books*.

Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal Is Political: The Original Feminist Theory Paper at the Author's Web Site." *The Personal is Political: The Original Feminist Theory Paper at the Author's Web Site*. Carolhanisch.org, 2009.

Haynie, W. J., III. "Where the Woman Are: Research Findings on Gender Issues in Technology Education." *Technology Teacher*, vol. 64, no. 7, April 2005, pp. 12-14, *EBSCOhost*.

Hobson, Janell. "Digital Divas Strike Back: Digital Cultures and Feminist Futures." *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender.* State U of New York P, 2012.

Irigaray, Luce. *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University, 1985. *Kunsthallezurich.ch*.

King, Aziah. *Imgur*. Imgur, 28 Oct. 2015.

McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium Is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw-Hill, pp. 7-24, 1964.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium Is the Massage*. Bantam, 1967. *Archive.org*.

Scott, Joan W. "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 33-50. *JSTOR*.

Smith, Rohan. "Huh. Turns out She Wasn't Lying after All." *NewsComAu*. News.Com.Au, 5 Nov. 2015.

Michael T. Williamson

DEADLY INIQUITIES

YIDDISH WRITERS RESPOND TO THE TREATY OF NON-AGGRESSION BETWEEN GERMANY AND THE USSR

During times of occupation, citizenship and civic identity can vanish overnight. During the month of September in 1939, the citizens of western part of the nation of Poland suddenly became the slaves of their Nazi occupiers. The citizens of Poland east of the River Bug, on the other hand, became third class citizens of the Soviet Union. In this essay, I consider the ways in which the modernist interwar Soviet Yiddish poet Peretz Markish represents the responses of Polish Jews to these deadly inequalities after the 1939 partition of Poland into Nazi and Soviet occupied zones. As a writer whose earlier work sought to unite Jewish Poles as "equals" in an international citizenry under the umbrella of Soviet communism, Markish's literary commentaries on the sudden loss of rights that Poles, especially Polish Jews, experienced after 1939 serve as an important and overlooked contribution to Holocaust literature.

The Nazi-Soviet "non-aggression pact" was signed on the 23rd of August 1939 and the "treaty on borders and friendship," which established trade relations and borders between Nazi and Soviet occupied Poland, was signed a month later, following the Nazi bombardment of Warsaw, the massacre of Polish refugees by Luftwaffe pilots, and the Soviet occupation of the eastern half of Poland. Peretz Markish, an anti-traditionalist modernist Yiddish poet who renounced his Polish citizenship and emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1926, was positioned to respond to this partition in ways that other Yiddish writers in Europe and North America were not. Markish was a "partitioned" poet, more complexly divided between Polish Jewish and Soviet Yiddish literary cultures than his peers, who usually fell on one side or the other. Aesthetically, he was constantly moving between three literary sensibilities: European modernist, Soviet Yiddish modernist, and mystical Jewish. In his responses to the partition of Poland, he ranges across all three of these sensibilities in order to establish the aesthetic terms that might define a surviving remnant of Jewish literary culture in Eastern Europe before, during, and after the Holocaust.

Markish left Moscow in 1921, when he was 26, and he applied for Polish citizenship that year. His birthplace, Volhinya, had been part of Russia before the Russian/Polish/Ukranian civil war, and was now within the borders of the new independent Poland. Once in Poland, Markish devoted himself to Western European modernist literary culture and strove to bring that culture to the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. As a map made by Aleksandra Geller shows, his fifty-one interwar lectures in Poland, sponsored by the Polish communist journal Literary Pages, circumnavigate the borders of interwar Poland. In these lectures, Markish argued the fairly conventional modernist communist line that the artist's role in the "time of transition" was to draw the "flow of ideas" drawn away from tradition so that it might be recast into a "new substance" based on new "primitive principles" derived from the "chaos of the present" (Geller 93). This new world, he argued, would erase the inequalities of the past and would replace internalized Jewish self-doubt with a discourse of empowered resistance, inaugurating an "absolute cosmic culture" (Geller 97).

Such discourses of empowerment, in fact, were a hallmark of Markish's literary readings. He was a brilliantly unconventional speaker, with "the face of Adonis," whose lectures fell on his listeners like "fiery waterfalls of speech" (Geller 90). Yet his version of modernism, which sounds much like Isaiah Berlin's "unbridled romanticism," in its "hysterical self-assertion" and its "nihilistic destruction of existing

institutions" (Berlin 145), could not compete with the attention that Hasidic mysticism received, not only from the Polish Jews of the *shtetl* (traditional Jewish communities) but also from Jewish intellectuals. Whereas Markish's radical modernism sought to contract and erase the traces of Jewish tradition, or "Abraham's idols," in literature, Hasidic mysticism worked through a process of intensely inventive accretion – a prayer uttered in a field of grass might cause the listener to hear God's voice singing in the grass, or to be absorbed into the roots of God through a tree, or both.

The resistance Markish encountered to his conventional Soviet modernist communist message from both Hasidic and assimilated Jews led him to renounce his Polish citizenship and return to Moscow, where he could make a living as a writer. In Poland, he had been likened by the surrealist writer David Bergelson to a "broken clock that chimed endlessly and which, simply by chance, sometimes told the correct time. But no one noticed because no one was listening" (Geller 98). In Moscow, Markish was no longer so divided, and although he was occasionally criticized for "ideological deviations," he was awarded the Order of Lenin and served as the head of the Yiddish section of the Soviet Writers Union from 1939 until 1943. He became conventionally Soviet and, surprisingly, conventionally Jewish as a writer. His published responses to the Second World War and the Holocaust, for example, follow the conventional pattern of Jewish responses to catastrophe that David Roskies describes in *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Roskies argues that Jewish writers represent disaster by drawing analogies between prior Biblical archetypes and present experience. In the gap between the horrors of the present and the normative liturgical stability of the past, the literature of destruction is formed. Although Markish draws from very different Biblical archetypes – for example, whereas many writers referred to Job, the sacrifice of Isaac, or God's command to Abraham to "go forth from the land of your fathers," in "To a Jewish Fighter" written in 1943, Markish urges Soviet Jewish soldiers to fall on their enemies like the sons of Jacob fell upon Shechem and his sons – his published writing follows an acceptable normative pattern of Jewish response to catastrophe that interestingly raised no objections from Soviet censors. His works that were refused by Soviet censors, on the other hand, tell a very different story.

In his post-Holocaust novel, *Footsteps of a Generation*, completed in 1947 before the beginning of the Soviet Anti Cosmopolitan Campaign to erase signs of Jewish culture from the Soviet Union, Markish suggests that the partition of Poland, and not the Nazi invasion of Soviet-occupied Poland, marks the beginning of the Holocaust. At the beginning of the novel, three Jewish characters stand on the eastern banks of the River Bug, just outside the town of Brest-Litovsk, and contemplate a crossing over the frozen river, whose banks formed the dividing line between Nazi occupied Poland to the east and Soviet occupied Poland to the west. The date is January 1940, and the frozen ground on which they stand resonates for each of them with the echoes of past events, near and far. For Bernard Gross, a Polish Communist who had fought against the Nazi invasion of 1939 and who had escaped to the Soviet side of Poland, there is no question of crossing and leaving the Soviet Union: the river represents to him the border between a defeated, no longer viable Polish Jewish culture in Nazi occupied Poland and the promises of the Soviet Union, "a new world which at one go took into its hospitable expanse hundreds of thousands of homeless, fed them with bread, covered them with a roof, and protected them from death" (*trot fun doyres* 4).

Bernard's depiction of Soviet occupied Poland as an "hospitable expanse," is only accurate, however, if we think in terms of the landscape itself, into which over 200,000 out of more than three million Polish Jews escaped, finding temporary refuge until the Nazi invasion of 1941. Officially, the Soviet policy was to refuse to accept Jews attempting to cross over the River Bug and to return them, if they managed to cross, back to Nazi-occupied Poland, where they were then sent to what later became the death camps. Markish thus has Bernard speak to a geographical truth that belies a political Soviet indifference to the

fate of the Jews. The River Bug becomes a physical boundary that enables Bernard to ignore the ways in which he and other Jews are bound by political history. To cross the river back into Poland from the Soviet Union would, for Bernard, be a crossing back into a permanently damaged culture for which there could be no future. Traditional Jewish culture, which for Markish means Polish Jewish culture, had let itself be betrayed by democratic nations, and the backwards "dreaming" of Polish life in the shtetl had insulated Jews from the realities of the progress of history. The River Bug is a protective barrier for Bernard, a sign signifying the remorselessness of modernity in its conflict with and ultimate triumph over tradition.

Bernard's companions, the recently married Vigda and Slavek, see matters differently, and for them the river is a source of continuity, since they feel they should return to Poland to rescue their shtetl parents and reunite the generations that have been severed by ideological upheaval and war. For them, modernity's boundaries are porous – one can cross a river, return to the past and link traditional Jewish culture to its modern Soviet incarnation. The River Bug is for them one of many rivers of exile that must be crossed; it is an archetype of exile, like the Jordan river or the Rivers of Bablyon, that must be crossed if Jewish singing is to continue in the world.

This displacement of the immediate history of Poland's partition onto rivers and onto the landscape was essential to Markish's wartime writing, especially because he was driven by both the constraints of Soviet censorship and by his own partitioned sensibility to represent Polish Jewry as a reactionary, primitive form of medieval culture. As David Schneer has pointed out, in Soviet Yiddish fiction "rivers became actors – sometimes victims, sometimes bystanders – in the human drama going on around them" (Schneer 148). The river is described by the narrator as a mystical presence, a surreal landscape of blowing snow and vanishing distances, a place that absorbs Bernard's attempts to represent it as a conduit for the transformation of "moss covered religiously ecstatic" and "meek and fearful" Polish Jewry into hardened Soviet citizens cleansed of their "nationalistic" tendencies and their "misplaced lamenting mysticism" (Schneer 151). Indeed, by the end of the novel Bernard's understanding of the line of partition along the River Bug as an ideological point of demarcation between "old" Polish Jews and "new" Soviet Jews is exposed retrospectively by another character as an act of complicity. She says, "we can see everywhere that we are different. Every threshold burns you with its inhospitality" (Redlich 418). The pretense that Soviet Jewish culture represents a superior version of a Polish Jewish culture that can be abandoned and replaced by a new Soviet culture becomes yet another phantasm produced by modernity's nightmarish hostility to tradition.

Markish's attempt to narrate the events of World War Two from a Jewish perspective, far from preserving Polish Jewish culture after the war, became evidence supporting a series of false charges of espionage leveled against him and other Yiddish writers. He was criticized for his "nationalistic tendencies" and for the "misplaced lamenting mysticism" that underlay his otherwise acceptable representations of Soviet patriotism (Redlich 418). He was arrested in 1949 and shot, along with 13 other Jewish intellectuals, in 1952.

Markish's mysticism, as the remnant of murdered Eastern European Jewish culture in a supposedly utopian Soviet world, offers the world far more than the "misplaced lamenting" that was so scorned by his Soviet accusers. While every newly formed threshold between Poland, Germany, and the Soviet Union "burns [Jews] with inhospitality" in *Footsteps of a Generation*, Markish's earlier poetry written immediately after the initial partition of Poland in 1939 suggests that he was already working on creating representations of Jewish literary creativity that would survive a time of lamenting that was fast approaching. If Jews could not cross physical boundaries in post partition Poland without being burned, perhaps a more mystical form of motion could be encoded within a figure of literary and cultural inheritance. Faced with the murderous inhospitality of two occupying forces, Markish looked inward to

create what Jacques Derrida, in one of his many plays on the dynamic interplay between hostility and hospitality, calls, "hostipitality." For Derrida, hostipitality enables self-authorization within conditions of confinement and the activation of "a self with a rapport to itself" that produces a condition of "auto-affection, auto-motion, the fact of being able to move oneself, to be moved, and to affect oneself" ("Hostipitality" 420). Can we then, against this backdrop, say that Markish offers Yiddish writers around the world an aesthetic of hostipitality that might complicate the ways in which we understand Holocaust literary history?

Perhaps we can, but certainly not in the terms that Derrida, whose misunderstandings of Jewish mysticism are as frequent as they are frustrating, suggests. In a poem composed immediately after the partition of Poland, "To a Jewish Dancer," Markish draws from mystical Jewish traditions to create a complex literary figure for traditional Polish Jewish culture: the woman dancer whose feet carry her across the world in her exile. In a masterful mingling of the Arabic ode, Hebrew love poetry, and Hasidic storytelling, three literary forms whose confluence has been understudied in Yiddish literature, Markish represents the Jewish dancer as the figure of the beloved, a composite version of the self and its fantasies, its experiences with the sacred, and the sacred emanation of God on earth, the "shekinah" of Jewish mysticism. At first, she invokes awe. "To a Jewish Dancer" begins with the image of the dancer's feet flashing like "sharp knives tossing about and colliding / their blades dazzling with suffering" (*Inheritance (Yerushe)* 6). The lines recall the cherubim and the "fiery ever turning sword" that guards the way to the tree of life at the end of Genesis 3. The poet yearns for the beloved dancer in her exile, wondering "how can one weave oneself into that radiant coil / Or unravel the beginning from the end" and lamenting his incapacitation in the face of her plenitude, "I cannot get an answer from your mouth / I cannot cross the divide between your lips" (12). His remembrance of her as the beloved, according to the conventions of the Arabic, Hebrew, and Yiddish love poetry that guide him, is full of mystery. He remembers and recalls, "my bewildered hands are still / Radiant from placing them on your body" and "from pressing with my mouth your golden hair / My mouth is rimmed with little golden dawns" (12). For much of the poem, the Jewish dancer is a figure for the experience of exile from the sacred, not from a specific lost home. Her feet flash across time and history; they propel her continually away from the garden of Eden and yet they guard her from death and protect the tree of life, which has over time become a mystical "tree not yet planted / But which yet bears the burden of blossoming and growing" and which the poet wishes to invoke through kabbalistic spells (the tree is the central figure of kabbalistic mysticism). But he does not trust spells and magic to counter the force of history, which drives the dancer onward in the form of a Golem that makes her wear a yellow patch and pay taxes even on the patch itself.

As Markish follows the dancer from the gates of Eden and into Nazi Germany, he pauses at the River Bug, just as he did at the beginning of *Footsteps of a Generation*. In this earlier poem, written as history was unfolding, Markish represents Polish Jews as emanations from the dancer's footsteps:

> Is their a road that has not felt your pain and grief?
> Brest-Litovsk was opened up like an ancient holy book
> And hordes come, laden with lament and sorrow.
> [….] Their parchment brows are strained with speculation (*Inheritance* 32)

Brest-Litovsk, a Polish town annexed by the Soviet Union, becomes a holy book into which Polish Jewish refugees, themselves figured as books, enter. Yet though the poet asks his beloved, now not so much a dancing woman but rather a collective Polish Jewish culture shuffling between two colonial powers, "And when they left you by the Rhine in flames / Did not the Kremlin's stars ascend for you?" he is not deluded, as Bernard is, by the false promises that the Central Communist Party held out to Jews. Appropriately, he looks to the River Bug and laments:

> From the river Bug – an insane blizzard rages,
> With its whipping snow, it wipes out every footstep;
> And from the twisted menorahs of the Bailystok synagogues,
> They hung the goles [or exile], like some hanging fiddles. (34)

Like Vigda and Slavek, Bernard's companions in *Footsteps of the Generations*, the poet sees the river Bug on a continuum with the Jordan river and the rivers of Bablyon. But in a complex and barely veiled recognition of the Soviet deportation of thousands of Poles, with thousands of Polish Jews among them, to Siberia almost immediately after they crossed the River Bug, Markish recalls the desecration of Jewish synagogues on both sides of the Polish partition, the mangling of menorahs, the hanging of bodies, and the erasure of the source of Jewish song.

The river Bug, with its "insane blizzard" that wipes out all of the footsteps of generations, becomes a portal to the "hospitable expanse" of Siberia. The poem concludes with a vision of an end to exile in an imaginary new land, where Hebrew, which had been banned in the Soviet Union for over a generation, is taught to Jewish children. "Here," the poet says, "the earth to each and every one is faithful":

> Here even the driest roots shall bloom anew, --
> Here the sapling tree will be kinsman to you,
> Here every grain of sand will be a mother to you. (44)

The poet, after tracing the movement of the Jewish dancer, finds her on the shore of a mystical new world. Certainly, this "Here" is not the inhospitable Soviet Union. Given the poet's distrust of host lands that become murderous, it might not be a territory at all. Rather, following a line of thought developed by the surrealist mystical Yiddish writer der Nister, who formed a strong friendship with Markish from the mid-1930s until they were both murdered by the Soviets, "here" might be more like a Derridean conception of hostipitality as "auto-affection, auto-motion, the fact of being able to move oneself, to be moved, and to affect oneself." Or it might, more accurately, be a textual space created by Jewish mysticism, a heart of the world whose center was Poland. In this space, according to Der Nister in his 1939 novel anticipating the destruction of Polish Jewry in a pit of fire, *The Family Mashber*, sacred mystical texts ensure the continuation of Jewish language and life after the destruction. He writes:

> Everything that is touched on is a marvelously begun and incomplete tale and half tale, forming a fantastic arabesque of God's name braided with flowers and with the dead, and those as yet unborn, the dead from whose bodies emanates a persistent odor that covers the world; and with the shades of those tormented souls who wander about unable to find a resting place; and with still other forms: shape shifters, ghosts, wandering spirits, plagues, demons, good and evil angels and various people who have been cursed. (Der Nister 274)

This is the world of Isaac Bashevis Singer, who once won international awards for keeping alive the traditions of Jewish mysticism from Polish Jewish culture. We once celebrated his works, despite their difficulty and their more than occasional incomprehensibility. Now we focus instead on postmodern representations of the Holocaust, steeped in history perhaps, but removed from the complex and diverse Jewish contexts that were part of interwar Jewish literary culture. Markish's and Der Nister's work is even more incomprehensible and difficult than Singer's, especially when it is "in rapport" with its own mystical traditions and not divided into the "types" of Judaism advocated by the Soviet Central Committee. I suggest in closing that when we study the Holocaust, we take the time to read Yiddish writers, especially the eastern European Yiddish poets, and that we supplement the commemorative markers and monuments of historians with the more fluent, fluid, and hospitable texts of Jewish literary history. Perhaps, eager as we are to leap ahead to "representations of the Holocaust after 1975," to quote

the title of a recent volume of *modernism/modernity* (Haig 1-13), we can slow down long enough to learn about Yiddish literature "written before, during, and after the Holocaust," to quote from the subtitle of a recent translation of Der Nister's stories published by Northwestern University Press (Der Nister, *Regrowth*). The full title of that book of stories is *vidervuks*, or "regeneration." Perhaps it is time to think more carefully about that word, and about *yerushe*, "inheritance," the title of Markish's last book of poetry. In a post-Holocaust world, these words, even as they emerge from a portioned Soviet Yiddish literary culture, might resonate more strongly for us now, if only we would let them.

Works Cited

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Princeton UP, 1999.

Der Nister. *Regrowth: Seven Tales of Jewish Life Before, During, and After the Holocaust*. Translated by Erik Butler. Northwestern UP, 2011.

---. *The Family Mashber*. Translated by Leonard Wolf. New York Review of Books, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. "Hostipitality." *Acts of Religion*. Edited and translated by Gil Anidjar, Routledge, 2002.

Estraikh, Gennady. "Anti-Nazi Rebellion in Peretz Markish's Drama and Prose." *A Captive of the Dawn: The Life and Works of Peretz Markish*. Edited by Joseph Sherman, Gennady Estraikh, Jordan Finkin, and David Shneer, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011, pp. 172-85.

---. *Yiddish in the Cold War*. Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008.

---. *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism*. Syracuse UP, 2005.

Geller, Aleksandra. "Peretz Markish and Literarishe Bleter (1924-1926)." *A Captive of the Dawn: The Life and Works of Peretz Markish*. Edited by Joseph Sherman, Gennady Estraikh, Jordan Finkin, and David Shneer, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011, pp. 88-102.

Haig, Francesca. "Introduction: Holocaust Representations Since 1975." *modernism/modernity*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-13.

Markish, Peretz. *Yerusche* (Inheritance). Translated by Mary Schulman. TSAR Publications, 2007.

---. *Trot fun doyres* (Footsteps of a Generation). Soveitskii pisatel, 1966.

Redlich, Shimon. *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documentary History of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*. Routledge, 1995.

Schneer, David. "The Holocaust and Jewish Vengeance." *A Captive of the Dawn: The Life and Works of Peretz Markish*. Edited by Joseph Sherman, Gennady Estraikh, Jordan Finkin, and David Shneer. Modern Humanities Research Association, 2011, pp. 139-56.

---. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918-1930*. Cambridge UP, 2004

AJ Schmitz

REVIEWS

AMANDA OAKS'S *THE RIVER IS EVERYWHERE*. RED FLAG PRESS, 2017. PP. 39. $7.
WESLEY SCOTT MCMASTERS'S *TRYING TO BE A PERSON*. WORDS DANCE PUBLISHING,
2016. PP. 47. $12. ISBN 978-0997940404

I f we have learned nothing from the 2016 General Election it is that rather large swaths of the *real America* feel disaffected and alienated. Some think that there is a monolithic anti-intellectualism running through the country, a unilateral bigotry, racism, sexism. David A. Graham noted in the March 2017 issue of *The Atlantic* that the "important lesson of last year's presidential election" is that "the United States is coming to resemble two separate countries, one rural and one urban." Feelings of voicelessness have gripped sectors of the body politic and these feelings of disquiet have been exploited to divide the country. Many believe that *real America*, the Rust Belt being a prime example, is an area of backward-thought, or regionalism and parochialism. Many think this area is incapable of tolerance, of culture, or emotion and understanding. To those who ascribe to this monolith, I offer two collections of poems penned by the sons and daughters of this region whose voices work toward fighting this stereotype and illustrate voices which sound a clarion-call for a revised way of understanding those portrayed as the disaffected.

Amanda Oaks's *The River Is Everywhere* is a majestic work of singular vision. The governing image of the river snaking its way through every one of the 23 poems of the collection offers both a divisive and unifying theme for her work. Many times the river is symbolic of grief, epitomized by its depiction in "This Poem was Written Inside The River." It opens with the decisive statement that "I am not lying facedown at the bottom / with my lips stuck in the mud anymore", a clear indication of the speaker's resolve to break the cycle of pain; however, this is short-lived:

I mean, that's what I like to tell myself
when I feel like I can't breathe,
when I feel like I could fall
in love with my own sadness

The back-sliding speaker continues his or her justification by asserting "what I mean is—despair / looks good on me." The river is poised to swallow the speaker in the mire of pain, and here she is making excuses for not moving on, for fighting to wear this grief as a beauty mark. We are all of us guilty of making such concessions; we are all of us aware of the effects our mourning has on those around us. If The River, capitalized as specific, runs through us all, there can be no division because while emotions may vote Red or Blue, they know no abstract boundaries—they are colorblind.

The unifying symbol of The River plays out more often than not in this collection. Often considered a geographical feature of rural America, these poems illustrate the constancy of the river in us all. In "What Will The River Swallow Today?", the poem which opens the collection, The River is an equal opportunity force of nature, taking in the bodies of women, cigarette boxes, empty beer bottles, a promise and a lie. In a stanza on par with Eliot's description of the Thames in *The Wasteland*, Oaks's speaker loads The River with the waste of society, or merely the leavings of a fine time on the banks of the Mississippi, or the Ohio, or the Rio Grande. It is filled with the traces of lives lived and lives lost, but what remains is The River winding its path through the interior of this country. In the final stanza the poet constructs vessels to navigate these teaming waters:

The fire canoe hearts of steamship queens
are built to carry the heaviness of struggle—
they will stay afloat long after the explosion;
they will swallow as much water
as they can hold until The River
devours them whole.

The lasting nature of The River endures, and while the vessels humanity constructs to survive upon these waters may brave a few squalls and attempt to subjugate the lasting power of The River, they are ultimately poisoned. The only constant is The River itself and the destruction it brings in its wake.

The River can become home. It is human nature to cope with adversity, to defy it and appropriate it, to make it our own. Ego allows us to live comfortably in and around that which disturbs us. "When The River Asks Me To Describe My Grief" tackles this issue. The River of Grief has infiltrated our sanctuary, the "robber of breath" drowns us in a flood of emotions which feels like "thunderbolted knees / hitting the bathroom floor." The sensation, as the speaker adjusts,

felt more like
tumbling down a staircase
into the basement of a heart
that no longer relays rhythm.

In *The Poetics of Place* Gaston Bachelard discussed the essential nature of home as sanctuary. For many, Bachelard contends, it is the locus of all our comfort—our bedroom, the kitchen—as well as the well-spring of all our fears—the cellar. Oaks deftly plays with these essential aspects of human nature by allowing the destructive nature of The River to infiltrate the most sacred of places then doubles-down by including the entire edifice, upstairs and downstairs, as a site of pain, eliminating any semblance of secrecy, any place of self-reliance and self-preservation, putting us all at risk of succumbing to our own grief. The exoteric has thus become esoteric, dwelling within us all, leaving none of us safe.

This is not to say that overwhelming grief is the de facto condition of the human spirit. There are memories and the ties that bind us to our pasts. In a collaboration with Wesley Scott McMasters, Oaks plays with the pleasure and pain of nostalgia in "The River Quietly Hums Along to Interstate Love Song." This piece originally performed at the monthly Lit Night held at the Artist's Hand Gallery in Indiana, PA, embraces the individuality of memory as well as shared experiences. "It always starts with the unlocking of fingers or splayed palms [...] so easy to bend hands, so easy to love hands, suddenly woken hands, hands in the morning holding the scent of night like a pair of hips or two over-filled communion cups." It is the hand, what Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift describe as "pathways to understanding," that provide the overarching theme of this text. The River sits back as the poets reminisce about the hands that grasped at them as they walked out the door and the hands that held them tight. It is the father's hands, "cracked & worn by the ice-cold night air & too many machines fixed before the sun came up on a December morning," or the "Hands like bodies handing out of sunroofs, hands like highways, hands like merry mixer rides, hands well-versed in the language of taking stones out of shoes." These hands are ideals, Roethke-like images we think back on, recast in our minds to produce memories we love from those we hate. These hands are conflicting ideologies which make a "living with a paper & pen & a good set of reading glasses" while still resembling those of their father. This piece staves off the unifying grief of The River and gives a respite from our own neuroses of basking in the beautiful thoughts of who we are and from whence we came. The closing lines of the poem, italicized for effect, beg an answer to the question: *What do we do with the hands?* The answer is unclear, but this moment of self-reflection acts as a Cougar dam, holding back the torrent of The River, if for only a brief moment.

Drafted and work-shopped by the two poets, "The River Quietly Hums..." offers a segue into McMasters's collection, *Trying to Be a Person*. From the same area of Western Pennsylvania as Oaks—nearly the same town—McMasters's work is a revelation in its ability to manifest a worldly intellect from a place traditionally thought to be peopled by those who scoff on such notions of leaving the place you are from. Many of the 18 poems are set wholly or partially outside of Western Pennsylvania though written in that very part of the world refuting the Wolfeian notion that you can never go home again. "Girls With Coins" is a perfect instance of this concept. It opens with the speaker articulating the different types of girls in the world:

> some girls drink whiskey
> for the taste
> or to say 'Manhattan'
> but you drink it to get fucked up
> like it was meant to be drunk

Through a Bukowskiesque vision of the world, the sense of place is undeniable. "Manhattan" illustrates the conspicuous act of consumption of both substances and a feeling of self-worth tied to urbanity. The subject of this poem, however, is *not* like one of these girls. She is self-effacing, self destructive, and wholly unknowable. Memories of being "in a city I loved / standing with a girl I loved more / and I never understood" signal a transition in the speaker's understanding of his place in the world. The lack of punctuation and the loose structure of the poem mirrors his inability to fully understand or pin-down the object of his affection, likening her to "a child's furious wall scribble / passed off as modern art" and to a "painting misunderstood / and something / lost." Situating the text in a city, in a cathedral of the urban, juxtaposes the speaker's upbringing with his desired future only to be ultimately lost on him. The text is purposefully disjointed, mimicking the pattern of thoughts as they enter the brain, though they all point to the misunderstanding between the Janus-Heads of rural and city life.

"New Orleans Architecture" plays a similar role in the collection, illustrating the conflict between, much as Oaks's work describes, the rootedness of home and the insecurity of the beyond. The reader learns over the course of a ten-hour drive that "Maine interstates don't have billboards" and how "there's something beautiful about that / but I don't like pine trees," a line reminiscent of Frank O'Hara's "Meditations in an Emergency." The reader is taken on a tour through a tumultuous relationship moving through Maine, to Tampa, and then New Orleans. The spaces of possible connection presented by the speaker are not quite real. The Tampa airport is where the speaker was left by the girl who went home and found another. They never kissed under the gaslights of New Orleans. The gut-wrenching satori comes not in a city in the beyond, but in the realization that

> my fingers will never crawl up your side
> or learn the curve of your neck
> instead
> I'll become some artifact
> a pressed flower in a book
> that you forgot was there
> until you opened it up
> to your favorite passage

The constant movement through space in the poem is offset by the emotional vulnerability exhibited when the speaker finds his roots—or lack thereof—with her. Movement is off-set by the image of the destruction and reclamation of nature by man-made structures. He will forever be a memory for her,

situated in a static location, unable to move until she allows it. The feeling of stasis, longing for flux, is a part of the human condition, and while the speaker romanticizes mobility it is only by staying in place that he becomes significant, much removed from Oaks's image of the River as a structure of constancy.

Rootedness features prominently throughout this collection, and the feeling of home, of feeling in-place, is voiced in every selection. "For AJ; Or Why I Still Rock My Khakis with a Cuff and a Crease" uses the frame of describing out-of-stater who has come to Western Pennsylvania: "once you said / *I am home- we live here*" which focuses the speaker on the nature of home as the connection to people rather than merely places.

> I see you and me and everyone
> with arms spread out
> fingers apart
> like the roots of an oak tree [...]
> and these roots that spread out into the air around us
> hanging on desperately.

People come and they go but are somehow entwined with the very soil of this place: "I reach out and my finger-roots breathe in the dirt-air / and I know that I am home." The speaker realizes that while the soil is important, other elements render a place home. To the out-of-stater, he lovingly states:

> and you don't have finger-roots
> you are the tree
> and you hold those around you
> with Christmas lights.

The feeling of home is the people who traipse in and out of our lives and brighten them place up, who bring together disparate personalities and ideologies, and celebrate them with "an airplane bottle of Canadian Club just in case it's a long night." It is, and has always been, the people around us who make a place home, and the rootedness we feel relies upon them, whether they twinkle like lights or leave you at the Tampa airport, to make us feel a sense of belonging and comfort.

The images and emotions brought up by these two volumes are inherently place-bound but translate well into the human vernacular. Their structures mimic everyday speech and thoughts and do so without a regional accent. They extend beyond the regions from which they were created and communicate objective truth. In a sense, they present a united voice from a place long-thought to be voiceless. We are all of us vulnerable, all of us capable of love and of pain. We are all of us searching for a route by which to escape and grasping for something that can root us in place. A rivers runs through all of our lives, connecting states, connecting coasts, intersecting voting blocks and demographics. We sometimes wish we could move beyond such divisive institutions and limitations, but what comes across in these two collections, again and again, is the idea that beyond all of the layers of constructs, all of these structures we surround ourselves with, we are all of us tied to our place in the world and to the world as a whole. We feel pain. We feel loss. We also feel compassion and understanding. Most of all, we feel connection.

Works Cited

Graham, David A. "Red State, Blue City." *The Atlantic,* Mar. 2017, theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/03/red-state-blue-city/513857/. Accessed 29 Apr. 2018.

Elizabeth Jaeger

BUTCH

You've asked me before when I first realized I was different, when I first knew I didn't quite fit in. I answered honestly: "I don't know." However, there is a nagging voice, one which whispers in my mind at night or when I am alone. With its help I remember. And wonder, did I always know and just not recognize it as knowing?

As a young elementary aged child, I sat outside the circle of other kids in the neighborhood. Looking out at them, at the world, I saw a division that didn't make sense, one in which I'd never find my place. I've always gotten along better with boys – mostly. Never one to sit or enjoy sedentary activities, I took to sports at an extremely young age. During the summers of my late elementary school years, boys in the neighborhood would ring my bell early in the morning. They'd have bats, gloves, and balls. As soon as the bell rang, I grabbed my glove, kissed my mother good-bye, and ran out of the door. When we played, no one made any distinctions between them and me. We were simply a group of "guys" playing baseball.

Around fourth grade, James, one of my classmates, invited me to his birthday party. There were no other girls on the guest list, and both his mother and my mother were concerned that I might feel uncomfortable or out of place. James insisted inviting me was the same as inviting his other friends, and I couldn't understand why being a girl should matter. My mother, somewhat hesitantly, agreed to let me go. However, the morning of the party, she handed me a dress. In those days, kids dressed up for birthdays. I didn't object to dressing nicely, only to the clothes which would make me stand out, the dress which would signify the fact that I was indeed different. How could I keep up with the boys in a game of tag wearing a pair of girls' shiny black shoes? How could I roughhouse, when the rules for wearing a skirt differed greatly from the ones pertaining to pants? My clothes, not my sex, isolated me and impeded my ability to participate equally.

Eddie was always the fastest kid in our grade, but we had only ever raced in gym class on the wooden floor. James argued the conditions outside were different, and would, therefore, yield different results. He challenged Eddie and everyone else to a race. We waited for traffic in the street to abate and then spread out behind an invisible line. Before James screamed "Go," my eyes glanced down the row of kids. My feet — the only ones not in sneakers — stood out, marking me as "other." Distracted, I started a beat after the boys, but it didn't matter. The hard sole of my shoe slipped on the blacktop making me stumble. The shoes had no traction, and the backs of them dug into my Achilles' tendons like pick axes. I finished last, and while the boys didn't seem to notice or care, the loss still stings in my memory. Had I been dressed like them – rubber soles and long pants – I would have finished stronger; I wouldn't have felt like a loser.

By seventh grade, the gender lines became more severe. The girls in my class discovered make-up and mini-skirts, neither of which could be worn in the Catholic school we attended, but that didn't matter. At lunch, the girls talked about them anyway. They talked about boys and who they wanted to kiss. Having no interest in any of the subjects dominating their conversations, I hid behind my homework. Something was wrong with me. Something inside of me was broken.

I still loved to play sports and wanted to run with the boys, but they started to shun me. They were too busy talking about girls — who they wanted to ask out and who looked the hottest. For me, these topics were considered unacceptable. Unable to participate in their conversations and lacking in feminine qualities to be an object of their young lust, I was left out. But unseen and ignored was sometimes better than standing out.

One spring day when school was not in session, Jennifer, a girl in my class, invited me to join her and few other girls up at the playground on Myrtle Avenue. Having nothing else to do, and wanting desperately to belong somewhere, I went. Shortly after we arrived, Danny showed up dribbling a basketball. The entire school considered Danny to be the best basketball player in Sacred Heart, and on that day he challenged me to a game of one-on-one. Naively, I accepted. Always competitive and irritated that the kids in school regarded Danny as the best player without ever considering it might be me, I had no intention of letting him win. He started stronger. Scoring twice, he led the game 2-0 within the first few seconds. Then I scored, and with the game 2-1 he crashed into me, knocking me to the ground. I called an offensive foul, but the girls booed. Danny laughed and calculated the score - 3-1. Infuriated, I went on to tie the game, 3-3. Embarrassed and enraged, Danny ripped the ball from my hands and went home. The girls all followed. Before disappearing around a corner, Jennifer turned around and shouted, "You didn't need to ruin the day, did you? Next time, just stay home." Alone on the court, I cried. I had done something wrong, but what that something was, completely eluded me.

A week later, Danny branded me for the first time: *Butch!* I didn't know what it meant. But his tone, the way the girls giggled when he said it, and the way the boys repeated it, as if savoring a particularly sweet piece of candy, indicated the term was loathsome. Danny intended to cut me deeply by singling me out and hurling insults I didn't fully grasp, insults that sliced into my already fragile self-esteem. He succeeded. At recess, if I got too close to any of my classmates, either boys or girls, someone would inevitably sneer, "What do you want, Butch?" After the first few times, I kept to myself.

By the end of the year, feeling trampled and insignificant, I withdrew so deeply into myself I didn't even want to raise my hand in class. I wanted to be invisible. My parents, aware of the name-calling, met with the principal, Sister Bea, and requested her to do something to stop the harassment. She refused. Without proof, she declared it would be unfair to punish Danny or anyone else. Without proof, the torment continued unabated.

The following year, Danny branded me again. *Lizzy the Lessy!* I didn't know what "Lessy" meant. I had no idea it was a derogatory abbreviation of lesbian. But, like "Butch," the word sounded so abhorrent. When he put his lips close to my ear and hissed the phrase I wanted to distance myself as much as possible from it. Whatever a "Lessy" was, I didn't want to be it. When Danny saw me wince, he shouted the phrase across the classroom. Our classmates picked it up, each of them now wielding a knife of their own. And still my teachers said nothing. I grew to hate school more than ever. Walking out my door in the morning filled me with dread and my footsteps, trudging to school, were heavy on the pavement. My parents, however, only knew the kids called me "Butch" and that the word made me feel like an outcast. My tongue refused to wrap itself around the phrase *Lizzy the Lessy*. So I buried it, a weight pressing down on my chest, making movement difficult.

Then one fall day at dismissal — the scent of rain mixing with the pungent odor of decaying leaves — Danny leaned in particularly close as we stepped outside. His breath burned my face as he snarled, "You're a girl, why don't you act like one?" I had no answer. I only wanted him away from me. And when his lips started to curl around another syllable, I pushed him, not hard, just hard enough so he'd leave me alone. Wanting to be as far from school as possible, I picked up my pace, but as I turned the corner of the building, Danny rammed his body into me. The force of his momentum shoved my head into the orange bricks of the building. Instantly, an intense bolt of pain splintered through my skull.

Something inside of me snapped. All the pain and anger that had accumulated through the years erupted out of me. Wanting to inflict as much pain as possible, I threw my very first punch, but he dodged and it landed on his shoulder. He grabbed my arms and tried to wrestle me to the ground. Pulling one arm free, I meant to hit him again, but one of the third-grade teachers interceded. She grabbed my hair and his arm and dragged us into the principal's office. When I tried to break away, her wrist twisted and pulled at my hair so violently that pain surged through my scalp prompting me to shriek in agony. In Sister Bea's office, she shoved both of us into separate chairs, told the principal what she saw and then left, slamming the door closed behind her.

I glared at Sister Bea and Danny, my eyes shifting between them. An intense feeling of loathing rose up inside me. In religion class, year after year, my teachers told me to turn the other cheek. But I was fed up with them. I didn't want to be a good girl. I wanted the taunting to stop.

"Attacking your classmate is a sin." Sister Bea sat behind her desk, her voice barely rising above a whisper.

"And what do you call what he's been doing to me since last year? What do you call the name calling? And what do you call this?" I touched my eye where my head had smashed into the bricks. Pulling my hand away, I noticed the blood. Sister said nothing, ignoring my wound completely.

"That is a different matter."

"No, it's not." Anger shoved aside every other emotion. How dare she accuse me? I asked only to be left alone. Why was that such an awful, impossible request?

"There is never a good reason for a young lady to strike a young man." She stared at me, her eyes narrowed to pinholes through her thick glasses.

"But it's okay for him to do this?" I stood up, pointing again to my head.

"You pushed me first." Sitting perfectly straight in his chair, his hands folded as if in prayer, Danny smiled innocently. I wanted to punch him and knock out every single one of his perfectly white straight teeth. I wanted him dead.

"You were making fun of me."

"I just asked you a question."

"One that was –"

A loud booming noise interrupted me. I turned toward the door and saw it vibrate under the strain of a pounding fist. Sister ignored it, or tried to, but the banging grew louder, more insistent.

"Let me in now!" My mother's voice ripped through the door. Unbeknownst to me, my younger brother had witnessed the entire scene outside and had raced home to tell my mother.

Reluctantly, Sister Bea stood up and opened the door. My mother — her face red, her eyes on fire — launched into an offensive. "For two years," she wildly gestured with her hands, "we've asked you to do something about the name calling. We've begged you to intervene. But you refused to do anything until you had proof. Well, now you have it. I expect Danny to be punished."

Sister would not be swayed. Her eyes locked with my mother's as she responded, "But they were both fighting. If I punish him, I must punish her as well."

For a brief moment, I thought my mother might pummel the principal. Instead, she squinted her eyes, and with a voice that sliced through Sister's serenity, she said, "May God forgive you." Then turning her back on the nun, she grabbed my elbow and escorted me home.

No price would be paid for the blood that had been shed. Danny had scored a resounding victory, and in the days that followed he grew more brazen. Taking their cue from him, the other boys showed no mercy. I lost my name and became "Butch" or "Lizzy the Lessy." At times, feeling tears rise up into my eyes, I'd raise my hand and plead to go to the bathroom. Sometimes the teachers granted me this little reprieve. When they did, I locked myself in a stall and cried until the pain subsided. However, the

teachers were often complicit with the cruelty and wouldn't let me leave. On those occasions, I stared out the window, tuning out the lesson along with the taunting.

My gym teacher, a faceless body standing in the shadows of the gym, was the worst. When a teacher has a student who is an outcast, one who has been ridiculed and emotionally tortured, it should be obvious that playing dodge ball with six balls is a bad idea.

During the game, the gym had been transformed into a mass of chaos. Twenty-two students ran around completely unrestrained, scooping up balls and flinging them at each other. I don't know if the effort was agreed upon or if it arose spontaneously, but six boys, led by Danny, held onto the balls as they pressed me into a corner. Reading the intent in their eyes, I fell to my knees. Before I could cover my head with my arms, they hurled the balls at point blank range, nailing me in the face, back, and belly. One ball bounced off my ear so hard that when I sat up I couldn't hear out of it. The laughter and the torrent of "Butches" that poured down on me were muffled.

For twenty-four hours, I lost hearing in that ear, but the doctor assured me there was no damage. He was wrong. My hearing returned, but the thought of going back to gym terrified me. One last time, my parents appealed to the principal. First, one boy had assaulted me and then six. What would be next?

Sister Bea remained obstinate. She could not comprehend my pain, the agony of feeling isolated and alone. But I absolutely refused to return to gym class if the boys were there, and so she excused me from gym for the rest of the year. The boys had attacked me, and yet, because I was different, because I was afraid of them, afraid of what they might say or do next, I was the one who suffered suspension.

One day while the class was at gym, I sat reading *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* outside the principal's office, and I started to cry. I tried to stifle my sobs but couldn't silence them completely. Sister Bea heard me and stepped out into the hall.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"It's not fair," I protested. "I never did anything wrong."

"If you never did anything wrong, you wouldn't be here." And before I could argue, she retreated into her office and shut the door.

Staring blankly at the book in my hands I wondered if it were true. Was it my fault for being different, for being unable to change? At that moment, I hated myself more than I had ever hated Danny or any of the other boys.

Now we have an answer. Now you know when I first realized I was different, only back then I equated different with bad. Because I couldn't fit in, because the principal punished me for it, there was obviously something seriously wrong with me. I learned no matter what I did, unless I could cut out the rotten part, I would always be unworthy of happiness and friendship.

Yes, that's the lesson I learned in middle school — that there was something wrong with me because I was different. And more than two decades later, despite no longer caring about what people think of me, I still carry the scars of youth. The word "Butch" still rankles me, more so than "Lessy," though I honestly can't say why. Whenever I hear it, I'm back in middle school, and the boys' taunts are as loud as ever. But after years of running and hiding from myself, I finally realized that the problem wasn't me. It was the school, the teachers, society, even Catholicism. I wish I could go back and tell that to my thirteen-year-old self. Maybe then I wouldn't have spent my high school and college years feeling confused or suffering bouts of self loathing, but I can't. The best I can do is relate my story in hopes that it reaches other kids, so that they know what I didn't, that just because they're different doesn't mean they're wrong. That just because they don't fit in, doesn't mean they necessarily need to change.

Patti See

CHANGE AGENT IN THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY

I'm at the front of the pack in this bonding exercise, "Move Forward, Move Back." To start, all of us lined up along the hallway, shoulder to shoulder as equals. Our group is made up of a bank president, an elementary school teacher, a county board member, a small business owner, a community activist, two college students, three university professors and one staff member.

I predicted I might end up in the middle, since I was a working-class kid and a first-generation college student. Another white woman is at the front with me. I see her take the same baby steps as I do in response to questions like the following:

- If you expect or have received an inheritance from a family member... [I take one step forward.]
- If you often see people of your race or ethnic group playing heroes or heroines on TV or in movies... [I take another step forward.]
- If most of your teachers were from the same racial or ethnic background as you, take one step forward... [I take another.]
- If you were ever called names because of your race or ethnic culture, take one step back. [I stand still.]
- If your parents spoke English as a first language… If you see people from your racial or ethnic group as CEOs in most of the Fortune 500 companies.... If your school textbooks strongly reflected your racial or ethnic group... [I take three more steps forward.]
- If you come from racial groups that have ever been considered by scientists as "inferior"... If you believe you have been harassed by the police because of your skin color... If you, or a relative, have been questioned or detained since the September 11th attacks, take one step back. [I don't move.]

I can't see who stepped back, but I can hear the shuffle of feet on marble floors. This is a physical embodiment of privilege. Many of us are born with benefits we did not ask for, which is why, on this Saturday morning, anyway, I am ahead of my peers.

The word "privilege" makes many white folks like me recoil defensively. A student once asked me, "If I don't have to think about something, is that a privilege?" This is a simplistic explanation for a complex topic, I know, but it's a description that works.

Can you walk alone at night? Wear your hood up? Rent an apartment or buy a home wherever you want? Qualify for a home loan? If you've never had to consider any of these, then you have advantages other groups do not. Institutional racism is rooted in history, laws, and cultures, in fear and hate. All of us are biased because we live in a racist society.

Today those in the back—two people of color from our community—watch the rest of our group members step forward and back and forward and forward again, a metaphor on the state of our unequal country. This is hardly a surprise to these two, or the myriad of others they may represent. But for me (whose privilege didn't always feel like much) this is nothing short of a revelation.

I have another epiphany: those of us at the front rarely look back.

Patti See • Change Agent in the Chippewa Valley

This is our third Saturday morning together in our Circles of Change group. Before our first session, I found myself wondering how a white girl from white bread Chippewa Falls ends up in a conference room talking about race. Honestly, I think I've got nothing to contribute. What *am* I? Third generation mostly German-American. Culturally: White Trash. I often say this as a joke, but looking back even one generation the phrase wasn't so funny to my mother and her fourteen siblings working the family farm.

I tell everyone at our first meeting that I learned about race from 1970's TV. *Good Times* taught me that families are much the same: argue with your siblings and share a bed. *All in the Family* brought racism and sexism into everyone's living room. I tell these strangers, "I knew I had to decide if I wanted to be ignorant like Archie Bunker or progressive like Gloria and Mike. I sided with the Meathead."

The one woman of color says she's here because she wants the world to be better for her biracial kids, who haven't had to endure the type of hurtful questions she did as a child. As a Californian-born, Filipino-American she often heard: "What are you, anyway?"

That first session, we had concerns. For many of us, front and center was our whiteness. One participant said, "I've never experienced what it's like to be followed around a store."

A student asked, "We're young, so will our ideas be brushed off?"

A fifty-something responded, "The longer you live, the less you know."

Will our message permeate the targeted audience? And just who is that? Our friends, families, and neighbors? Racism is not just burning-crosses-in-yards, but more nuanced: a distrustful glance, a singling out.

We have ground rules we all agree upon. Be respectful. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Speak for yourself, not others. Agree to disagree. If we realize we have said something inappropriate we can say "oops" as an apology. If we are offended by something a group member says we can say "ouch" and explain why. Expect and accept non-closure. Recognize that discomfort often leads to growth. What happens in the group stays in the group.

I teach a class on "men and film," and sometimes I can't turn off the movie references in my brain. All I can think is, "The first rule of Fight Club is *you do not talk about Fight Club*. The second rule of Fight Club is *you DO NOT talk about Fight Club*."

Circles of Change is more like a "Peace Club." Just a few months past the 2016 presidential election, we're trying to convince ourselves there doesn't have to be an "us and them," that if people are authentic and come together in a safe place then the irresistible force of change will take over. Small steps may lead to impactful results.

The first day, we end our session by sharing common themes and one-word descriptions of the session. *Eye-opening. Hopeful. Unifying. Humbling. Exciting.*

After two hours together on a cold February morning, eleven strangers have bonded.

When our co-facilitators lead us in a de-briefing of "Move Forward, Move Back,"[i] we stand in our places scattered along this hallway, another white teacher and I at the front. Two college students and two community members are a step or two behind. Two more participants are many steps behind.

Our co-facilitators coax us into talking about some uncomfortable questions: *How does it feel to see our peers step forward or back? What does this say about our country? What might this mean for our community?*

If our goal is to transform institutions, we must face behaviors, our own and others'. This benefits everyone, not just people of color in our community.

One student tells us that his friends often pine for the experiences featured in movies about the Civil Rights Movement. His response: "You're alive now. What are you doing?"

•••••
"What you don't do can be a destructive force." —Eleanor Roosevelt

Two Circles of Change pilot groups launched in the spring of 2017 and included people from throughout the Chippewa Valley—from the cities of Eau Claire, Altoona and Chippewa Falls and the Village of Lake Hallie—which has a total population of about 98,000 mostly white-Christians. The nearest "big city," Minneapolis-St. Paul, is ninety minutes away. Our Saturday morning group was an odd mix. Two people of color raising biracial children, one person of mixed race, and eight white people. We were mostly Wisconsinites with some transplants who chose to move here. Two 19-year-olds along with 30, 40, 50, and 60-somethings. Mormon and Catholic and non-denominational. Singles and married people—with two participants married to each other. These seven women and four men likely would not have crossed paths except for Circles of Change.

We met for six two-hour sessions—each one growing more complex—based on a guidebook adapted from *Everyday Democracy*, a Connecticut-based organization whose mission is to help groups create dialogues which build communities that work for everyone. These are discussions that people like me rarely have: Making Connections, Our Ethnic Backgrounds and Racism, Our Unique Nation, Why Do Inequalities Exist, and Looking at Our Community. Finally, the two pilot groups gathered for a final "action forum" to decide upon what we will do to make the Chippewa Valley a safer, more welcoming environment for people of color. Our first two projects included "Humans of the Chippewa Valley: Expanding our Narrative One Story at a Time," a webpage featuring photos and oral histories from diverse people, and "Family Conversation Kits," available at schools and from public libraries with age-appropriate books and a guide to discussion starters about diversity.

In early 2017, Barbara Yasui from *Everyday Democracy* trained facilitators—school board and city council members, principals and other educators, and business owners—who will pair up to lead ten Circles of Change groups. Each group will work through a guidebook and gather information and local statistics. Together the groups will create more action plans for implementation.

Yasui acknowledged, "There is a deep division around race. We need to come together and be able to talk about these issues. People often are afraid they will say the wrong thing. We need to help them to talk about it so they become more comfortable."

This initiative came out of an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Implementation Team at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, which identified "specific" ways to meet the needs of diverse members of the campus and larger community. Sweat equity for Circles of Change came from two key players: Dr. Audrey Robinson, Director of the Academic Skills Center, and Mike Huggins, a retired Eau Claire city manager who teaches Honors courses. Both are beyond passionate about this project, and they hope for its effects to ripple out across the Chippewa Valley for years to come.

"We all live in our community so we are affected by what happens there, whether it's at our bank, our grocery store or the YMCA," Robinson says. "We need as many voices as possible to make this work."

•••••
"Yesterday I was clever so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." —Rumi

The week before my first Circles of Change discussion, I was detained in the El Paso International Airport for thirty minutes—one of those travelers having her bag searched and contents swabbed. I tested positive for something. Explosives?

"I don't even set off fireworks," I want to tease as two agents whisk me to a table.

Each question I ask is met with a terse, "Step away from me, ma'am. Don't touch anything." My carry on, briefcase, coat, laptop, shoes, wallet and belt are taken from me. I follow in silence.

My heart pounds as I watch the agents rummage through my perfectly rolled clothes and shake out my dirty underwear. They swab my shoes and toothbrush handle, then peer into my mouth guard container. I have nothing to hide; still, I sweat through my clean t-shirt.

"We're going to have to search your body in a private room," one says to me.

"But why?" I try to control the anger and fear in my voice. Should I say that I'm just a Wisconsin gal coming home from visiting her son, who works in federal law enforcement? Do you get a phone call when you're a security risk? Do I even have his work number?

I follow the two agents to an area the size of a department store fitting room. When I hear the door lock behind me, a little voice says, "You may never get out of here." I'm traveling alone. No one will miss me for eight hours. Irrational, I know, but these agents speak a language other than my own; they look different than me.

A female agent explains how she's going to use the back of her hand to pat my breasts and groin and the front of her hand for the rest. "Just do it," I say. She touches each humiliated inch of me, and then methodically moves her gloved fingers through my tangled hair.

Finally, she says, "You're free to go."

I nearly cry.

Only when I get to my gate do I contemplate how I experienced something that people of color go through on a *daily* basis. White, middle class people like me don't have to think about privilege or race unless we choose to. People of color or other marginalized groups live it every moment of every day. Historically, power structures are based on who tells the story and how it's told. For years, voices from people of color have been silenced or overlooked. As the Chippewa Valley becomes more diverse, our story is changing. At a Circles of Change meeting a white participant says, "Most of us don't know what we don't know."

● ● ● ● ●

"All I can offer in the face of uncertainty are my attempts to pay attention, to resist complacency, and to find ways to give more and love better." —Krista Bremer, "American Winter"

Something phenomenal is happening on these Saturday mornings. Strangers come together to talk about how to make the Chippewa Valley more accepting to everyone. Strangers become friends. When I carry materials back to my office, I watch a few of our members out the window as they walk together to their vehicles. Even on these twelve degree winter mornings, a small group stops near their cars to talk a little longer.

Our group is moving towards action. We make lists: What's working in our community? What is not? We vote on areas to target and decide upon Criminal justice/ law enforcement, Employment, Media, Housing. Our mantra is "Start Small, Think Big."

Our goal is institutional change, but in order to accomplish that, we realize we have to affect people's hearts and minds. We start with our own group. One week our "homework" is to bring in an object that tells the story of our personal history. Members display them in the center of our conference table. A family Bible. A carved Last Supper. A beer stein. A washtub. A flute in its black case. A Hershey's bar.

Really, chocolate? I'm judging a little bit. I can't wait to hear about that.

We each have exactly sixty seconds to tell our story.

"You can't make a S'more without a Hershey Bar," says the young woman whose family runs a resort in northern Minnesota. "What smells like home to me is a campfire." I tear up. The same is true for me.

We hear that many traditional Filipino households have an ornately carved Last Supper and an oversized wooden fork and spoon on their dining-room wall. And that this stein represents Friday nights at an uncle's, when everyone gathers with a pony keg of beer to play Euchre or Sheephead. The flute player comes from a family of musicians going back generations. One participant offers a video about her Minnesota culture. "*Not too good* is worse than *pretty good*," she says in a lilting accent. Another participant tells us about how her German great-grandfather was persecuted for his Mormon faith, and his Bible—along with a hand-written family history—has survived more than a century. I tear up again. Our histories define us, no matter how distant.

My relic is a steel Wheeling washtub my grandparents bought in 1920 for their rented farm in northwest Wisconsin. When I brought it home from my 91-year-old dad's garage and scrubbed it on top of my hot tub, I couldn't help but say out loud, "Adults bathed here." I soak in a 103 degree spa for fun, and my grandparents and parents survived with no indoor plumbing and bathed in a tub smaller than a beer cooler.

Unfolding before us are common themes among these strangers' histories: family, food, religion, survival. Imagine if we did this adult "show and share" at board meetings or orientations—how much we'd learn about each other.

Today, only the professor forgot to do his homework, an irony which makes the two students smile. He tells us he would have brought corn, since you can't make a Mexican meal without it, going back to pre-Columbian times. When he moved to the Chippewa Valley he told himself, "As long as I can find corn tortillas in the supermarket, I'll be fine."

The goals of Circles of Change are many, but at its heart is helping all of us in the Chippewa Valley find our version of those corn tortillas.

_____

Notes

[i] "Move Forward, Move Back" is adapted from exercises developed by Paul Kivel, Martin Cano, and Jona Olsson.

Jefferson Holdridge

ALLA BIFORA

Sparrows are both friendly and secretive.
In Venice, however, pigeons are more famous.
For they fill the Piazza and the *campos*,
Soiling the place and suddenly taking flight.
You wondered where the sparrows nest and live.
In hidden gardens, we thought, anonymous
Behind high walls, on which the wisteria grows.
Just as plates are cleared they quietly alight
And soon the noisy, sloppy pigeons come.
She felt sorry when a pigeon was torn apart
By a seagull with a killer's evil eye
Nature has no conscience or it's dumb.
Sparrows are as cruel as brave and shy.
Humans no more moral than their art.

Jefferson Holdridge

FRAGMENT OF AN ODE

Catullus wished he were the sparrow
Lesbia kept near her breast.
Such a thought comes like an arrow
And leaves no rest.

Here, each of us inhabits
The lover Catullus
For time is the sparrow
And Lesbia the space
To which the sparrow flits.

And both quickly forget us
Like Venice, her breast and her face.

Bronwyn Mauldin

DROUGHT

We licked dawn dew from spider webs,
picked wild sorrel from the side of the road.
The green tang made our mouths water.
It did not taste like rain.
We plucked musk sage leaves,
stuffed them in warm crevices to mask our stink.

We reaped golden grains of dying greengrass
grown shoulder-high,
roasted them in a cast iron skillet
until they popped like corn.
They tasted of summer wildfire.

We followed our cats to find
the coolest place in the house
where we lay on taut backs
and searched the smoke-stained ceiling
for signs. It revealed only faint
silhouettes of our own hands.

We drank beer and drifted through bent streets,
squatted and pissed in dead ends
where parched gray mule deer
flicked indifference to our fear
with ears like darkened sails.

We collected coyote scat, dried it in sunlight,
gathered the fur it left behind
– jackrabbits, mice, a feral kitten –
wove it into the linings of our shirts
and dreamed of deluge.