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**"TROUBLED IDENTITY AND THE  
CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF CULTURAL  
STUDIES"**

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**Dr. Susan Flynn and Dr. Jonathan Wright,**  
**University of the Arts, London**

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# **Troubled Identity and the Continuing Relevance of Cultural Studies**

Special Issue Guest Edited by Susan Flynn and Jonathan Wright  
University of the Arts, London

**The Apollonian: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies**  
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## Introduction

### Troubled Identity and the Continuing Relevance of Cultural Studies

Susan Flynn & Jonathan Wright, University of the Arts, London

Cultural studies emerged out of the political upheaval of the 1950s and 60s, as part of an attempt to understand the hotly contested political and social changes taking place in Britain and beyond. This critical approach was inherently irreverent to orthodoxies, to hierarchies and to established viewpoints. Attempting to make sense of a world in transition, cultural studies has always been innately political, involved in social concerns and in the operation of institutional practices, norms and beliefs. As Stuart Hall put it:

Nobody thought it worth, let alone right and proper to turn on this dramatically shifting kaleidoscopic cultural terrain, the searchlight of critical analytic attention. Well, that was the vocation of cultural studies. That is what cultural studies in Britain was about. But I would insist on this starting point. I would insist on the tension characteristic in this work, which marked my own intellectual development and my own intellectual work ever since.

The maximum mobilization of all the knowledge, thought, critical rigor, and conceptual theorization you can muster, turned in an act of critical reflection, which is not afraid to speak truth to conventional knowledge, and turned on the most important, most delicate, and invisible of objects, the cultural forms and practices of a society, it's cultural life. (Hall 1992)

Cultural Studies was conceived as a form of intervention in political issues, and this need to intervene has arguably never been stronger. As culturalists we are in the business of trying to change the world around us, making sense of injustice and oppression and striving for improved social and cultural lives. While the field may have suffered criticism for being text-bound and academic without praxis, current Cultural Studies are embodied in the many art forms, media productions and creative work that we do as practitioners and as actors in the complex web of mediated contemporary life. "Significant political intervention is enacted more or less in the folds of these textual, occupational, artistic, communally lived relations. Cultural Studies is a full body experience" (Slack 2016).

The gauntlet thrown down by Hall was all about theorizing transitions, not as clear processes but as interruptions, and of understanding the connections that are undone and redone as a result of such ruptures in terms of both politics and identity. Our challenge today is to map these ruptures, created by changing boundaries both real and metaphorical, the contested terrain upon which identity is formed and enacted, and to create carefully considered constructive change in the way we see, recognize and think about each other. This form of political action is grounded in the Cultural Studies field but



looking outward to studies of race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, ability, and to the rich myriad of 'isms' which populate academic methodologies.

Within Cultural Studies one could argue that identity sits at the intersection between the study of material culture, media and cultural institutions, and the study of representation, language and the production of meaning in texts. The creation of 'identity' can be theorised through the self's relation to culture and society and also the (abstract) discourses/set of meanings attached to the body of the 'self'. Therefore, identity politics is formed through the tensions and dialogue between the ways in which 'the self' is articulated through discourses for gender, race, ethnicity, etc., and the corporeality of identity, the ontological materiality of our experiences of 'being' in the world. Cultural identity exists in spaces in-between essentialist approaches to the 'self' which make it fixed and stable through, for example universalized biological metanarratives, and anti-essentialist paradigms, which understand identity as shaped through an individual's complex and fluid relationship with material society and cultural discourses. In this sense identity is a perpetual process of becoming. Emerging from this complex and contradictory polemic, this special edition of *The Apollonian* draws on papers produced by authors from across the globe, working in diverse fields and specialisms to offer new and thought-provoking insights into the issues of identities as they are experienced, envisaged and performed today. There are two distinct narrative strands that bind these papers together.

The first strand, considers the ways in which fluid identity formation is in a perpetual state of flux. These papers address the impossibility of a fixed and coherent identity through an assessment of the body as performance, self-reflexivity, and identity formations within spatial contexts and boundaries. Lancy Thomas Kurakara's critique of essentialist identity politics examines the film *Tomboy* (2011) and the 2007 novel *How I Became a Nun*. Both explore the ways in which play and performance shape gender identity. Kurakara argues that *Tomboy* provides a new and innovative perspective on issues around transgenderism and a resistance to the limitations of conventional gender categories. Similarly, *How I Became a Nun* offers a parodic account of a performed narrator who 'is both adult and child' who plays with the construction of identity as a continuous and transformative process of becoming. Continuing with the notion of performativity, Antonia Mackay's paper "Hard Men: Manufactured Bodies and Hypermasculinity In The Literature And Culture Of 1990s America" reflects on the manufactured nature of the male body. In the films and literary texts which this essay considers, the importance of appearance over selfhood is indicative of the wider cultural concerns of troubled identities. The author tracks the superficiality of constant 'always on' visibility back to the 90s, a time when a surge in personal technology inherently altered selfhood and identity. Masculinities are troubled by this reflexive process, and the performance of gender itself is imbued with increased pressure. As identities are constructed by and through culture, they are always public and the work of performing identity is complex and troubled in our mediated times.

Meenu Chaudhary's paper on "Refugeehood and Its Discontents: Configurations of Sri Lankan Identity across Nation States" explores anti-essentialized formations of identity. In her piece she examines the writings of Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic writer Shobasakthi, who explores the history of Sri Lankan ethnic communities. Through a meticulously detailed analysis, Chaudhary proposes that these writings embody a series of national cultural formations that reflect the unstable and fluid nature of reimagined and fabricated identity categories. Angus Young's paper also considers a means to adapt to the challenges of identity categorization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Star Trek* proposes a contradiction between simplified stereotypes and complicated individuals, and Young proposes that the 'mixedness' in the *Star Trek* films and TV shows offers both an insight and an approach which could help Cultural Studies to negotiate with the variety of identity categorizations in contemporary life, what Mahtani calls 'continuous contingency'. The revival of the franchise in the 80s and 90s corresponds to the emergence of Mixed Race Studies, and Young articulates some of the nuances that both share. Opposing and unsettling conceptions of identity, Mixed Race Studies and *Star Trek* both espouse anti-essential spaces where complicated identity can fit.

Finally in this strand, Jaclyn Meloche examines urban identity and its construction. In her paper she critiques the sociology of human geography and proposes a postmodern framework through which to consider space. Dempsey and Millan's site-specific installation *The Grocery Store* is examined as an example of interrupting the gentrification of urban space. The installation raises questions of identity—how does identity become the result of an urban landscape? *The Grocery Store* blurs the lines between art and activism, but it also provides a useful example of the potentially troubling nature of urban space, whereby urban revitalization is connected to the flow of capital. Gentrification, in this way, also results in a narrative of problematized, fluid identities.

Rajorshi Das' paper provides a bridge between the first narrative strand of this collection, which focuses on identity as a perpetually transformative thing, and the second strand, normativity and the role of fixed (hetero)normative discourses in the formation of cultural identity. In this strand, the papers also consider the ways in which normativity can be deconstructed through an understanding of the processes of internalization and psychoanalytic paradigms, and an interrogation of the politics of stereotyping.

The Indian diasporic writer Aubrey Menen occupies a space in-between distinct identity formations as he cuts across both ethnic and sexual categories. His work, Rajorshi Das argues in his paper "Self and Sexuality in Aubrey Menen," represents a powerful critique of normative cultures. Menen's sexuality and ethnicity enable him to transcend beyond 'boundaries of nations or mortality' and his writings provide a reading of identity that is in a constant state of flux. Lauren Rohr's article also re-examines (hetero)normativity through a detailed analysis of the male gaze through a reading of the 2017 film *Beauty and the Beast*. Using Laura Mulvey's concept of the gaze and Richard Dyer's criticism of the stereotyping of homosexual men in film, Rohr argues that the male homosexual gaze can indicate a



character's sexuality without exaggeration and thus can normalize homosexual relationships. According to the author, such a gaze could be a subtle narrative device which has the power to influence societal expectations and in this way, may alleviate some of the troubling aspects of homosexual stereotyping.

Oughton and Gilbert's interventions into queer identities explore heteronormativity through an analysis of characterization and stereotyping. Charlie Oughton's article considers the character of Hiccup in the films *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010/2014). He proposes that this character represents a crisis of masculine identity. Through detailed textual analysis, which includes Freudian elements, the author constructs an argument that centers on the notion that Hiccup problematizes normative masculinity and in doing so opens the door to new forms of identification and an alternative to 'the cisgender binary'. Sarah Gilbert's work on queerness in Russell T. Davies' 'modernization' of the popular BBC series *Dr Who* (2005-present) also interrogates heteronormativity through the ambiguous representation of the character Captain Jack Harkness. She argues that he represents homosocial bonding through his relationships to other male characters, Gilbert examines the implications of his omnisexuality on the text's plot development and the portrayal of heterosexual characters.

With the coming together of these papers through its two distinctive narrative strands, this special edition of *The Apollonian* challenges existing forms of knowledge, enlists critical thinking in questioning the boundaries of the self and of the social meaning of the self. We examine the remit of Cultural Studies within and around the changing social landscape where identity is formed and we seek to enlist Cultural Studies to theorize these new realities.

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## Child at Play:

### Gender Performance and Plural Identities in *Tomboy* (2011) and *How I Became a Nun* (2007)

Lancy Thomas Kurakar, The M. S. University of Baroda, Vadodara

In answer to the question, "When do you think kids realize that one gender has more power?" Céline Sciamma, the director of *Tomboy*, answered: "I think kids realize it the minute they go to school" (Sciamma). However, this statement appears not entirely true in pinning gender politics on peer culture or schooling alone; given that children are acutely attuned to the subtlest interpersonal power dynamics, the knowledge of gender politics could precede its external manifestations. If, as Judith Butler argues, gender is nothing but "the stylized repetition of acts through time" (Butler 192), at what point of time in childhood does this process actually begin? Is the child always already gendered, as the texts in focus will show? If the premise of "automatic" genderedness is assumed to be true, then, gender must be an extension of the self itself; subjectivity must be the immediate cause and precursor to the process of gendering. This paper attempts to analyze gender as a site of play, of permeability, of performativity in Butler's sense, and of constant conflict between the self and the world.

The earlier notion of childhood as solely an adult construction—a tyrannical superimposition of ideals and prescriptive and proscriptive behavioural mores on the "blank page" of the child's mind—has become outdated. Recapitulating the sociological research done on childhood since Philippe Ariès, Suzanne Shanahan observes that, according to recent studies, childhood is "neither natural nor inevitable" (418), but, rather, is "historically, culturally, and politically constituted" (419) *with the help of* the child "actors" themselves who "participate daily in the articulation of their being" (419). Rather than being passive spectators to an oppressive moulding, children "creatively appropriate information and language from the adult world," "produce and participate in their own culture," and "help facilitate the reproduction of adult culture" (Shanahan 421). Thus, as in most critiques, it all pans down to culture—the antagonist and protagonist of history—that shapes individuals into social actors, who, ipso facto, constitute the culture.

The French film, *Tomboy*, is, eponymously, about a girl of around ten years of age, who pretends to be a boy for the course of a summer; Argentinean writer César Aira's novella, *How I Became a Nun*<sup>1</sup> is about a boy who, contrary to what the world tells him, believes s/he is a girl. The gender troubles in both texts are articulated differently; while *Tomboy* has a more ideological standpoint, attempting to expose the "conditionality of all gendering" (Waldron 60), Aira's book is targeted at exposing the ideological

presumptions of the reader who is conditioned to fixate on tragic, abusive childhoods, gender ambiguities, and Freudian dreams.

### Constructing Childhood, Narrative Strategies

*Tomboy* constitutes childhood as a spectacle, a performance, played by children, their games, their joys and sorrows, relationships, alliances, and politics. Without the pre-given knowledge of the film title, the protagonist (played by Zoé Héran), with the short hair, t-shirt and shorts, can easily be mistaken for a boy. The use of extreme close-ups creates the atmosphere of intimacy and, in a sense, pulls the viewer along to inspect the child, to figure out the “essence,” so to speak, of the “true” gender. The conclusion of these shots is there is no essence, no determining feature in physiognomy, behaviour, or social appearance that indicates gender identity. “If you think you’re looking at a boy, you see one,” remarks Roger Ebert, “If a girl, then that’s what you see” (Ebert). While the body can be *made* to suit or conform to one’s gender identity, as Laure is shown to successfully “parody” the male anatomy, the external world, however, demands essentialist conformation. The group of boys, the school, and other “state institutions” (Waldron 69) are the “antagonists” in the story who condemn self-determination and gender fluidity.

Childhood in Sciamma’s narrative is a period of one’s life no different from what characterizes the rest of one’s life time; the child in *Tomboy* is responsible, reasonable, lovable and loving, but, nevertheless, prejudiced or conditioned to think in certain ways, eager to learn the rules of the game (of adult life), and in implicit acceptance, capable of reinforcing them. The boys’ rule not to allow girls to play football with them, or the unanimous assertion that “it is disgusting” for a girl to kiss another girl are suggestive examples. However, the children are not blamed or judged; while these gender stereotypes are shown to be imbibed by the children, the ideological standpoint of the film is that of gender neutrality. The categories of “girls’ games” and “boys’ games” are shown to be baseless. Children can easily slide into one from the other, one identity to the other, one gender role to the other, and all of this goes to the construction of “the subject,” which, as Darren Waldron defines phenomenologically, “is the series of appearances through which it manifests itself” (71).

The capacity of the film narrative to *show* the child and to playfully and candidly incriminate the spectator in the lie, is, in a baroque way, exploited in Aira’s narrative. Unlike *Tomboy*, the title of which somewhat gives the gist away, Aira’s novella, *How I Became a Nun*, maliciously subverts readers’ initial expectations of a bildungsroman or künstlerroman in the tradition of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a narrative of a spiritual awakening<sup>2</sup> (O’Connor 268, 270). The gender dilemma that becomes obvious exclusively to the reader, and not even to the protagonist (the namesake Aira) or the people around him/her, is merely one of the many red herrings that the author uses to expose readerly prejudices and

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conventional expectations. The text is beset with paradoxes, contradictions and whimsical digressions. The first person narrator, the adult Aira recapturing the mind of the child Aira, begins the novella rather too straightforwardly:

My story, the story of ‘how I became a nun,’ began very early in my life; I had just turned six. The beginning is marked by a vivid memory, which I can reconstruct down to the last detail. Before, there is nothing, and after, everything is an extension of the same vivid memory, continuous and unbroken, including the intervals of sleep, up to the point where I took the veil. (1)

The six-year old who is at the point of beginning to become the “nun” of undisclosed age is another bait that Aira uses to create the illusion of a coherent and purposive narrative. However, the phrasing, “my story, the story of ‘how I became a nun,’” reminiscent of the ambiguous title of Kamala Das’s *My Story*, points to the artifice of the narrative, the fictionality of its proclaimed “truths,” and the lie (or euphemistically, the craft) behind all stories, all make-beliefs, all autobiographies. Aira, fundamentally, parodies the art of storytelling, which as the reader will realize, is nothing more than an intricate and evolved form of childhood lies or fantasies.

The construction of the child’s world involves an excavation of memory, the impressions, the images, the anger, the frustration of being not taken seriously, the rebellion, the mistrust of all adults and adult things to the point of destroying the “illusion” that a child grows to *become* an adult, become anything, in fact. Preposterous though this may seem, this is exactly what Aira does with his protagonist. The child Aira never grows to become the afore-mentioned nun, nor does he even grow beyond age seven. The life of the adult narrator as a six-year old, in fact, starts and ends in a year. ”Human beings tend to make sense of experience by imbuing it with continuity,” writes Aira, “what is happening now can be explained by what happened before” (46). While subverting this principle, he replicates it by constructing his narrative on the basis of this principle alone, as is evident in the bizarre logic connecting a foul-tasting ice cream, a murdering father, a dead ice cream vendor, cyanide poisoning, the bizarre nurse and the dwarf, the escapade in prison, school, the radio, the rubber nose and porcelain teeth, revenge of the vendor’s wife, and the sudden death by ice cream.

The art of narration, which is “the story” that Aira is writing of, begins in childhood, with the onset of “memory”—in this particular case, at the age of six. As Aira makes apparent, expressing a thought requires language, and giving form to one’s thoughts requires the knowledge that such a thing is possible and how it is done. One of the demarcating features between childhood and adulthood is agency, the power to be the “doer,” the “actor,” rather than the “acted upon.” This is not to say that the child lacks agential power; the child does have it, but this agency is without authority or credibility. Expressed more succinctly, “Children may have voice, but adults control the conversation” (Shanahan 415). Aira attempts to redeem this voice, to couch the intricacies of child thought in the language and knowledge it had hitherto lacked. It may sound precocious and incredible when the six-year old Aira professes:

I was not cooperating with science. An urge, a whim or a manic obsession that not even I could explain impelled me to sabotage the doctor's work, to trick him. I pretended to be stupid ... I must have thought the opportunity was too good to waste. I could be as stupid as I liked, with impunity (Aira 32)

or speaks of being “fastened to a pain that towered over my childhood, my smallness, and my extreme vulnerability, indicating the scale of the universe” (Aira 11). While the feelings themselves may have been perfectly plausible, the diction appears incongruous; the lack of a narrative Voice in childhood is exactly the basis for this incongruity. Aira's miraculously “speaking” child digresses from the tale it claims to tell—perhaps, a characteristic of the child's narrativity: the story purports to be how César, the boy who unremittingly believes he is a girl overcomes the gender divide and becomes a nun. Hereafter, the protagonist will be referred to by the masculine pronoun for the sake of readability and logical reasons such as, for instance, the unreliable narrator. The fact that the “story” never actually achieves or goes nowhere near achieving its completion, but from beginning to end proceeds through a curious mix of harsh realism and nightmarish fantasy, makes it all the more convincing as a tall tale that exults in its new-found narrative Voice.

In the ice cream fiasco described in the first chapter, the child's first taste of ice cream is spoiled because the ice cream itself is spoiled. Having no means to *know* that all ice creams are not equally foul, and unable to *communicate* the experience to the father, the child-Aira typifies a dilemma common to childhood. The communicative handicap evident in the initial ice cream episode is gradually overcome through Aira's progressive grasp of linguistic cognition, and thereby, narrative power. Narrating is, as the child discovers in an epiphanic moment, an act of drawing attention, of being visible, of creating the illusion of not being ordinary, and of wielding power. He misuses this power in the bus journey, embarrassing his mother with the performance of the hysterical, piteous, child inquiring after the missing father. “There was no stopping me now,” writes Aira, “The other passengers were already intrigued by the story, and that excited me inordinately. *Because I was the owner of the story*” (60, italics mine). Similarly, the commencing lines of the text, “My story, the story of ‘how I became a nun,’” is the declaration of the narrative agency the child-adult enjoys, the extension of the insight into language and its power that the child has acquired.

### **Gender: Performance and Play**

It is a common myth in childhood that the child is a gender-neuter being, who can or will become one or the other gender on reaching the threshold of adulthood, never both and never neither. This childhood concept of neutrality, “affinity” as Allison Miller calls it, stems from the awareness of similarity of child bodies as well as the “conscious acknowledgement of difference” (Miller 23). This binary of similarity and difference is the ground of play, that grey zone of permitted subversion, so to

say, the carnivalesque, wherein what is subverted is simultaneously reinforced. In the act of subversion, “the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself” (Butler 127).

Gayle Rubin, in her 1975 essay, “The Traffic of Women,” arguing for “an ideal and unconstrained polymorphousness” (Butler 100) of gender that precedes the procrustean, “artificial,” and, by extension, cultural categorization into the gender binary, writes, “each child contains all of the sexual possibilities available to human expression” (Rubin, qtd. in Butler 100). However, taking the cue from Butler’s Foucauldian critique of a pristine, untrammelled origin, we can assume that the child’s free-wheeling gender-swap does not point to the possibilities prior to gender and gendering; but, to the possibilities within the gender binary, the rules of gender games before they become strictly inscribed on the body, and the rules of childhood games, apparently free from adulthood yet so caught up with it. As Derrida points out from Saussure:

That ‘language [which only consists of differences] is not a function of the speaking subject’ ... implies that the subject (in its identity with itself, or eventually in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) is inscribed in language, is a ‘function’ of language, becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform—even in so-called ‘creation,’ or in so-called ‘transgression’—to the system of the rules of language as a system of differences, or at very least by conforming to the general law of *différance*. (Derrida 15)

The language rules of gender and any other cultural practice thus is necessary for intelligibility of all its offshoots, “all of its effects” (Saussure, qtd. in Derrida, 15). The children’s world of play is a site of subversion of the adult realm as well as an affirmation of the same; these games are not without their own share of rules, codes, and norms of fair and unfair, right and wrong, inspired from the adult world. These rules codify the unspoken gender biases and norms such as in the boys’ only football game, the makeup session, kissing dares (*Tomboy*) or the boys’ fights in defense of honour besmirched by insults aimed at one’s mother (*How I Became a Nun*).

As a “girl who likes boyish things,” as the definition of “tomboy” goes, Laure is not discouraged or “corrected” by her parents, but her wishes and likes are freely indulged in. But this is not to say that she is brought up as a “boy”; the genders really have no place in the family, and the fact that Laure goes for blue walls, wears loose boyish clothes and cropped hair, plays cards with her daddy and is taught to drive a car while her younger sister Jeanne likes pink and bright colours and has long curly hair, merely goes to indicate the gendered-ness of childhood. Laure is the older sibling within the confines of the household, the one who is responsible for the younger, able to take decisions, capable of understanding and reasonable behaviour. In the outside world, however, it is necessary to be either girl or boy, the first social identity. Thus, when Lisa asks her name using the masculine pronoun, Laure, on the spur of the moment, invents a new identity, Michaël. The adoption of a new gender identity is a conscious imitation, the performance of a performance, and Laure/Michaël, to sustain the illusion of being what she claimed to be, transgresses the very kernel of gender, the biological correlative.

If we are to take Sciamma's words as a definitive clue to the motive behind Laure a.k.a. Michaël's gender swap, the confusion of gender identity becomes a matter of politics, of the desire to belong to the powerful group, the sex category with prestige, heroic traits and relative freedom.<sup>3</sup> Laure's escapades as the "new boy in the neighbourhood" are mere masquerades, active imitation of the boys, so that, she might wish, she would be incorporated into the coterie; in other words, becoming a boy by behaving like one. She whips off her shirt to play football with the boys, spits on the ground, fashions her swimsuit into trunks, and even places a play-doh penis in it for credibility. While none of these gets her into trouble, the problem of peeing is the only serious drawback in the "performance." In an edgy scene, Laure jumps up while peeing when a boy comes looking for Michaël, and she wets her shorts. Rather than the dread of her lie being caught, it is the humiliation of wetting oneself, perhaps one of the greatest horrors of childhood that Laure faces. As a (new) boy, however, the repercussions are more grave; Laure/Michaël faces the shame of being not-quite-a-boy and the threat of being banished from the boys' group, which s/he longs to be included in.

In the bizarre world inhabited by Aira-the-child into which the reader is unwittingly drawn in, fiction and reality are fused, ordinary incidents are superimposed with the most baroque childish fantasies. The plight of the reader is similarly to what child Aira describes feeling on witnessing the strange, irrational behaviour of the adults around him: "standing on the threshold, transfixed, engaged in a warped attempt to connect up the different logics that had supplanted one another" in Aira's narrative (Aira 18). Free from any need to subscribe to the norms of the world, on account of feeling "dead and invisible" (64), Aira chooses a gender identity at odds with external reality. As in Bill Waterson's comic, Hobbes the talking, walking tiger pal is apparent only to Calvin, and the fact that others call it a stuffed toy does not affect the child's conviction<sup>4</sup>. The child's beliefs are his truths, the only reality. Similarly, in Aira's delirium-induced dream, he refuses to let in his parents into the house merely because they had told him not to let anyone in; the child is convinced that the figures outside are "simulacra"(27), "monsters" (26) who have taken the form of his parents. The outside world has impressed upon the child's mind an enormous mistrust of forms, of appearances, of external reality, and a blank refusal to acknowledge them. Therefore, the fact that he is "a boy by the name of César Aira" (67) to others does not hamper him in the slightest; Aira is a "devoted daughter"(2), "a perfectly innocent six-year old girl" (116) and a confessedly "difficult girl, a problem child in a sense" (28).

However, Aira at one point wonders,

Why didn't I have any dolls? Why was I the only girl in the world who didn't have a single doll? My dad was in prison ... and I didn't have a doll to keep me company. I had never had one, and I didn't know why [...] There was some other mysterious reason. (64)



He goes on in a self-consciously dramatic fashion, to draw in the reader's interest all the more with the sensitive topic of gender, as the child-Aira has been already shown to have done in the text, luring the passengers of the bus with a make-believe act. While Laure in *Tomboy* might have had her reasons for preferring to act as a boy, César has none or rather, he prefers not to discuss them. Nor is there any evidence for a power/prestige ratio between the genders as in *Tomboy*, which tips the scales in favour of the feminine gender and explains César's choice. Excluding the peers who are always boys, the adults around him are always women, in particular, mothers<sup>5</sup>. To hazard a guess, it might have something to do with the social predominance of women in domestic, medicinal, and educational spheres and the seclusion of men behind bars, shop counters, or as unembodied voices from the radio.

The child's subjectivity is formulated based on the meaning s/he derives from the outside, or in Levinas's sense, from the "other." César pretends, acts, and performs throughout the text; this performativity springs not from a conscious intention to subvert, but as a tool of making sense, of comprehending the world in the terms of the world itself. César realizes at the age of six, the notion of selfhood, of what it is to exist as a separate thing, with a private, exclusive access to a mind of one's own. His observation of his father, "He looked at me almost as if I had become an object, detached from him and his destiny" (13) is crucial to the understanding of what it means to be looked at and the formation of the self. Similarly, the roles that Laure plays are disparate, and constituted in accordance with the other, the inter-personal relationships; the roles are the many identities that constitute her selfhood. The essentialism of gender is, in this light, anomalous, redundant, and subversive of the very performativeness of subjectivity. Thus in both texts, the standpoint on gender is fundamentally this: *there is no essence, there is only play*. Identity is a site of play, or difference; while the possible configurations of the self in personal, familial, and social spheres are charted out and traditionally practiced, these configurations are, nonetheless, inadequate, overlapping, and proscriptive. The transgressions that culture allow work towards rectifying this limitation within the system, and are, therefore, set within the boundaries of the system itself. This is to say that child's play is located within the locus of adult culture, caught up in its binaries and rules, although this play simultaneously reveals the fundamental instability and constructedness of notions of the self and society. In sum, the child's formation of subjectivity recalls Wordsworth:

The little Actor cons another part;  
 Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"  
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,  
 That Life brings with her in her equipage;  
     As if his whole vocation  
     Were endless imitation.

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(102-107, “Immortality Ode,” Wordsworth)

The word *imitation* is crucial here; for “conning” different parts, pun intended, is not an original act, but derived, copied, modelled from the outside-world; it re-emphasizes the relationship between the actor and the play, individuals who constitute and are constituted by culture.

### Notes

1. The original novella, written in Spanish, *Cómo me hice monja*, was published in 1993. It was translated into English by Chris Andrews and published by New Directions in 2007.
2. In keeping up the illusion of a nun’s autobiography, a passage in the narrative describes the narrator’s 14-year-old self’s acute lack of knowledge regarding sex. O’Connor finds authenticity of the illusion in ‘the narrative voice [...who] sounds like a blithe, non-intellectual woman reflecting upon her childhood, chattering, blithering, filling in [...] the micropolitics of confrontation between her younger self and authority figures, explaining away unlikely events without ever acknowledging how bizarre they are’(269).
3. Laure’s sister, Jeanne, eagerly boosts the image of her “brother Michaël” by explaining to her girlfriend the comparative benefits of having an older brother rather an older sister: ‘Cos a big brother can protect you. You know, once, my brother fought some boys that were bullying me. He punched them really hard ‘cos they were rude to me. That was in our old home. He was the strongest boy in the neighbourhood. Everyone was scared of him and all the girls loved him. But he didn’t care about anyone else but me.’
4. Another narrative of childhood (re)created by an adult, wherein the child protagonist is endowed with an adult, “high-brow” vocabulary, employed in rebelling against the indignities, discomforts, and lack of autonomy in childhood (read as a metaphor for similar struggles in adult life).
5. Violent school fights take place in the narrative centred on the sacredness of the mother figure. Because this figure is idealized to such an extent, it is unimaginably profane too. The very word mother is seen as the gravest form of abuse, dishonor, and irreverence. Simultaneously, there is a disjunction between the real mother who is pitiful, passive, and unknowledgeable, and the Ideal, somewhat abstract entity that involves one’s own identity and honour. Thus, the narrator says at one point, ‘the mother figure was sacred for me too’ (48), only to have previously remarked about the doctor discussing the peculiar ailment of César with César’s mother, ‘He can’t have been a real intellectual, because he showed great interest in what Mom said to him’ (36).

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**Lancy Thomas Kurakar** is a Junior Research Fellow, pursuing her doctoral research in childhood studies at the Department of English, M. S. University of Baroda, Gujarat, India. A post-graduate in English Literature from The English and Foreign Languages University (EFL-U), Hyderabad, India, her research interests include childhood studies, film and women's studies, and cultural studies. She has

published the article titled “Colour Enchanted: The Use of Colour in Hilda Doolittle’s *Sea Garden*” in *The Compass Student Journal* of Arcadia University, Pennsylvania.

Email: [lancy.kurakar@gmail.com](mailto:lancy.kurakar@gmail.com)

## Hard Men: Manufactured Bodies And Hypermasculinity in The Literature and Culture of 1990s America

Antonia Mackay, Associate Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University and Goldsmiths, University of London

### I

In 2011 Sherry Turkle, published *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology*; a seminal collection of essays on the subject of our modern reliance upon gadgetised devices in order to lead ‘better’ lives. In the chapter entitled “always on”, Turkle describes her encounter with seven young researchers at MIT who “carried computers and radio transmitters in their backpacks and keyboards in their pockets” complete with “digital displays [which] were clipped to eyeglasses” (Turkle 151). Turkle refers to these researchers as ‘cyborgs’ capable of being “always wirelessly connected to the internet, always online, free from desks and cables” (Turkle, 151). Further examples of this cyborgisation can be found in contemporary literature, such as novels from Dave Eggers (*The Circle* (2013)) and Gary Shteyngart (*Super Sad True Love Story* (2010)) both of which feature protagonists who must confront the impossibility of identity in a tech-saturated environment, battling with a world of rampant gadgetisation which stands in for real people, real emotions and real identity. Contemporary movies have also focused on the power wielded by technological identity construction, such as the romance between Samantha (an operating system) and Theodore in *Her* (2013), the illusionary nature of modern life in *The Matrix* (2003) and the use of technology to remake the body in *Elysium* (2013). In our age of increased technological presence, the notion of being potentially ‘always on’—or becoming cyborgs—seems less than far-fetched. As consumers of technology, it would appear we are living in a visual oriented and progressively superficial world of bodily visibility. Consider our methods of communication - via email, and on the phone, through virtual friends, and the promotion of our lives through technological media (video, selfies, newsfeeds). Whilst we may consider ourselves to be corporeal over and above cyborg, our culture indicates that we already reside within an increasingly mediatized world, where our identities may be formed and manipulated by their visibility.

Turkle’s manifesto begs the question – when did we become mediatized? I wish to argue that our increasing reliance upon promoting a visible selfhood premised upon surface, emerged in the 1990s. Often deemed a period in history which gave us the ‘dot com boom’, the 90s can be viewed as a time which paved the way for our current fascination with constructing our identity through an online and media presence. Our contemporary technology was already an established facet of 1990s culture, where alternative media (namely, technologies) emerged as the new form of entertainment, from Josh Harris’ pioneering Pseudo.com live webcasting webpage, to the rise of personal and worn tech (phones, computers). Other new technologies specific to the 1990s included digital cable television and the

world wide web; both of which promoted televised and viewing services which extended beyond the traditional and into ‘on demand’, the obscure and the controversial (*Sex and the City*, *Twin Peaks*). Technology of the 90s also resulted in a boom in capital markets which, driven by increased interest in individual purchasing of devices, experienced an exponential increase (4% of the 1990s US economic growth was tech driven). In short, this was a period in American history characterized by a surge in personal technology—cell phones, personal computers, personal CD players—providing the potential therefore, for an increasing sense of Turkle’s cyborgisation. In this paper, I aim to develop the current scholarship in identity and media culture, into an exploration of the 1990s with focus on the effect this cultural shift had on American masculinity.

## II

Current studies in masculinities suggest both cultural and social definitions of masculine gender are premised upon a system of construction, where “true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body” (Connell, 45). What Connell makes clear is how the body determines our understanding of masculine gender interpretation, expressing masculine identity through a worn exterior, not unlike Judith Butler’s theories of performativity, where “the body is that upon which language falters and the body carries its own signs” (Butler 204). As a surface, a blank space upon which to carry signs, the body becomes a vessel of identity creation and manipulation:

“gender is neither something we have, nor is it something we are, rather it is something that we, with variable degrees of volition, do. Gender is a discourse we both inhabit and employ, and also, a performance with all the connotations of non-essentialism, transience, versatility, and masquerade that this implies. (Benwell 8)

As something ‘we do’ gender construction premised on the body is open to the possibility of shifting categorization and determinism. Furthermore, according to Connell, bodies can be “surfaces” or “landscapes” upon which “social symbolism is imprinted” (46). Male bodies are capable therefore of performing according to social and cultural expectations, reflecting and mirroring their environment in order to produce an identity in line with their contemporary ideology. It is the male body then which carries signification through its visibility, but if bodies are ‘imprinted’ with social symbolism, then identity appears fluid and open to transformation through a changing landscape of social signifiers. What these gender theories indicate is how inescapable the body is in determining a construction of identity, where maleness is reduced to “a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, [and] certain postures and ways of moving” (53). Men’s magazines for example, regularly feature images of acceptable ‘types’ of masculine bodies, with a heavy reliance on bodily representation. Bethan Benwell’s work on *Masculinity and Men’s Magazines* points to the problematic nature of male oriented media, where the shoring up of representations of masculinity in line with those of consumerism

threatens to destroy and divide traditionally masculine individualism. Benwell determines maleness, when reduced to a consumer product “challenge[s] established masculine codes and archetypes” (83) and magazines, media and popular culture in general, “acknowledge the reflexive process involved in producing gender... [where] the interconnections between and depending upon various cultural scripts or discourses...[creates] frequent ambiguity, contradiction, [and] negotiation” (Benwell 8).

If gender can only be understood as a series of acts and gestures which articulate an idea of gendered representation on the body, this implies the creation of an illusionary exterior, or a mask. In this way, masculinity when read according to cultural and spatial frames, and can be considered as a construction deriving a sense of visible identity through reproducing cultural signifiers on the body. In terms of the cultural ideology of the 1990s, the impersonal forces of mass consumerism exerted pressure on bodies to blindly consume commodities in order to fulfil the mythology of the American ‘way of life’. Male bodies were governed by the binary terms of gender performance, only with increased pressure in an era which embodied the ideals of social climbing and the ethos of being a self-made man. Whilst performative gender was still dictated by a “reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (Butler 1993), commodities appeared to be increasingly important in the creation of a coherent (and acceptable) identity. Gadgetry denoted power-hungry masculinity; a bachelor pad spoke of sexual independence; and the best suits, of financial capability. Within a culture rooted in possibility, in a culture which could manufacture bodies to fit the ideal, or create simulacra to mirror heady yuppie lifestyles, masculine bodies came to wholly represent identity. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, “the preferred body was one under control, pliable, amenable to the subject’s will: the fit and healthy body, the tight body, the street smart body... a body... more subordinate to mind or will than ever before. Just pick the body you want and it can be yours” (Grosz 2). The implication of molding the body into a type, automatically denies agency to the individual, and firmly roots the body as object to reflect and be remade, rendering masculinity as increasingly aesthetic and artificial.

Tom Wolfe’s *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987) enforces this notion of surface value as integral in determining identity. Wolfe’s protagonist, Sherman McCoy is a trader, and much of his characterization stems from his powerful position within a city, taking performative cues from images, mass media and the arts. For Wolfe, masculinity is defined by surface, where the “Masters of the Universe” (Wolfe 77) can purchase their masculinity through the acquirement of commodities in order to have their manhood observed:

Looking at Sherman McCoy, hunched over like that and dressed the way he was, in his checked shirt, khaki pants, and leather boating moccasins, you would have never guessed what an imposing figure he usually cut. Still young ... thirty-eight years old ... tall ... almost six-one ... terrific posture ... terrific to the point of imperious ... as imperious as his daddy, the Lion of Dunning Sponget ... a full head of sandy-brown hair ... a long nose ... a prominent chin ... He was proud of his chin. The McCoy chin; the Lion had it, too. It was a manly chin, a big round chin such as Yale men used to have in



those drawings by Gibson and Leyendecker, an aristocratic chin, if you want to know what Sherman thought. He was a Yale man himself. (Wolfe 9)

There is clear attention granted by McCoy's character towards an almost ornamental masculinity, marking his male body as a series of public poses, performed for the purposes of keeping up appearances. This type of masculinity, with its reliance upon 'props', defines it in Susan Faludi's words as 'pleasure seeking'. As a member of a powerful New York elite housed in a stable and distinctly male dominated space, Sherman participates in the grand consumption of wealthy objects – both in terms of space (living on Park Avenue, working on Wall Street) and other bodies ("one of the most beautiful women in New York... A frisky young animal! He was of that breed whose natural destiny it was... to have what they wanted!" (77)). As a pleasure seeking consumer, Sherman can purchase his gratification, most notable by his referral to himself as "Master of the Universe", and yet, for all his posturing, Sherman's performance is hypermasculine. His consumption of goods in order to fashion a visible identity, ultimately renders his body as spectacle: "Your *self* ... is *other* people, all the people you're tied to" (Wolfe, 529). Sherman's place in the masculine world of New York's financial district is for the purposes of the ends it produces, and rather than have an interest in wealth, Sherman makes money in order to purchase objects which bolster his appearance and performance. As Susan Faludi writes: "Ornamental culture has proved the ultimate expression of the century... the culture reshapes the most basic sense of manhood by telling him that masculinity is something to drape over the body, not draw from inner resources; that it is personal, not societal; that manhood is displayed, not demonstrated. The internal qualities once said to embody manhood... are merchandised to men to enhance their manliness" (Faludi 300). Sherman's bodily pliability reflects his spatial environment—he simulates wealth, prosperity and a type of masculinity fitting of his geographical setting, where modern masculinity is merely a societal spectacle.

The spectacle of the masculine body is integrally linked to metropolitan spaces, where it is the city's culture as structured, consumerist and architecturally utopic, which can shape bodies as a site of prosthetic transcription. The city is a boundary which houses bodies, but it is also the frame which allows the formation of bodily function: cities are the loci that produce, regulate and structure bodies (Grosz 104). New York City is a space Jean Baudrillard characterized as "space, speed, cinema, technology. This culture is aesthetic" (Baudrillard 100). As a space for men to mirror, Manhattan's density of bodies and buildings appears as capable of promoting and expressing a plethora of identities, where "selfhood seems wiped out by the act of looking at New York's skyline" (Banta 44). Within such vast bodily territories, and within a site as thickly manufactured as Manhattan, the body becomes a site of symbolism and citified signification. In terms of masculinity, the city is also a space of male fantasies, replete with phallic skyscrapers and power-hungry architecture which allude to dominance, size and phantasmagoric maleness (Banta). New York is also a space of hyperreality. As Baudrillard writes:

It is a utopia which has behaved from the very beginning as though it were already achieved... everything is destined to reappear as simulation. Landscapes as photography, women as the sexual scenario, thoughts as writing, terrorism as fashion and the media, events as television. Things seem to exist by virtue of this strange destiny. (Baudrillard 23)

Consider Times Square's many advertisements, screens and flashing neon lights—this is a space of technological and image density; one which is capable of transforming space into simulacrum, and transposing simulacrum onto the body (Colomina).

For *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, it is New York which marks Sherman with a veracious reliance upon the aesthetic—a similar motif to another Manhattan male, in Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991). In Ellis' first book *Less than Zero* (1985), the ongoing motto of “people disappear here” (Ellis 38) is reiterated as *American Psycho* tells us to “abandon all hope ye who enter here” (Ellis 3), establishing expectations of a voided and blank subjectivity within the novel's pages. Functioning predominately as a social satire, Patrick Bateman's first person narrative refuses to provide the reader with another vision, instead enabling a monotonous quality to exude from the chapters in homage to the hollowness of white middle class America. Throughout the text we are reminded that there can be two possible meanings to this culture – the surface and the subtext—and ultimately, as Ellis himself said “the surface became the only thing. Everything was surface” (Freccero 51). As a satire, the novel illuminates the artificial nature of 1990s consumerism—Patrick's Amex card for instance, offers him a sense of certainty, and it is the products in his world which emerge as stable and reliable, unlike the characters in the novel. As Julian Murphet has commented, it is the endless, monotonous descriptions of Patrick's clothes and the clothes of others which represent reification: “Courtney opens the door and she's wearing a Krizia cream silk blouse, a Krizia rust tweed skirt and silk satin d'Orsay pumps from Manolo Blahnik” (Ellis 8). Otherness is clearly identified and defined by a lack of sameness, as seen with Stash and Vanden: “even though he is probably uncomfortable at the table with us since he looks nothing like the other men in the room – his hair isn't slicked back, no suspenders, no horn-rimmed glasses, the clothes are ill-fitting, no urge to light and suck on a cigar, probably unable to secure a table at Camols, his net worth a pittance” (Ellis 12). There is even an entire chapter devoted to Patrick's morning habits, the precise lotions he uses and why, and the entire contents of his apartment described in minute detail. Perhaps most tellingly of his consumer driven identity is his sexual expression, which appears confined to the language of a stereotypical pornographic film in the chapter “Girls”. Notably however, Patrick's hollowness peaks amongst humanity, and it is consumer products which intervene to displace real emotion. In Linda Kauffman's words, the entire novel reads as “a novelistic version of consumer reports” (Kauffman 246) and Bateman guides us through the best clothes, food, furniture, stereos and music: “Ellis depicts a society that fills every minute of the day with salesmanship and self-promotion” (Kauffman 246). The effect of this is twofold: it suggests the innocuousness of modern society is entrenched in masculine identity, but also, the ways in which mass culture is reproduced into something identical. Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* enforces this motif:

“consumers appear as statistics... the culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product... pleasure hardens into boredom... the culture industry does not sublimate, it represses” (Leitch 1123). Bateman’s body then, as a consumer is one which is molded to fit, and ultimately represses his identity into one which appears performative.

As a social satire, Bateman’s semblance of identity is a reflection of those around him, ironically mirroring other’s shallowness, snobbishness and egotistical mannerisms in order to evade the unearthing of his true identity (as a psychopath). Patrick’s attention to other people’s clothing for instance, suggests his inability to identify with humanity, whilst his supposed business meetings are littered with references to brand names and products: “Hey Bateman... is it proper to wear tasseled loafers with a business suit or not? Don’t look at me like *I’m insane*” (Ellis 30). Bateman’s obsession with himself is not confined to his character alone, rather all characters in the text, especially the male characters, rival each other to be best dressed, most tanned and with the best body: “surface, surface, surface was all anyone found meaning in” (374). Perhaps unsurprisingly, mistaken identity occurs between nearly all the characters, but most especially between the moneyed men: “I trip out onto the street, bumping into Charles Murphy from Kidder Peabody, or it could be Bruce Barker from Morgan Stanley, whoever, and he says “Hey Kinsley”” (Ellis 145). Whilst alluding to the aesthetic and artificial nature of these characters and their culture, the repeated case of mistaken identity ultimately begs the question, who is Patrick Bateman? And if he is like us, then who are we?

The most troubling aspect of Bateman’s mirroring of culture is his violent acts. Julian Murphet argues that Patrick’s violence is a symptom of his waning sexual feeling under a regime of commodities, and it is striking that his attacks are normally the culmination of envy suggesting there could be a political element at work—one which alludes to a fear of anything removed from white upper class American males (Murphet 57). His violence directed to particular social groups could therefore be read as a form of urban gentrification, rejuvenating the city through the destruction of any bodies who don’t conform. Of course, this is yet another form of consumerism for Bateman. It might also be possible to argue that Bateman’s violence is directed not at these murderous acts, but rather at Patrick himself: “society becomes the victimizer as well, for having produced such a monster” (Knights 109).

The promotion of the self through surface and into simulacra turns Ellis’ male characters into societal figures whose presence is defined by an identical form of masculinity. It is after all, Patrick who is described by his colleagues as “the voice of reason” (11) and the “boy next door” (35), chillingly demonstrating the emptiness of other’s perceptions of Patrick, but also his ability to blur the line between public and private identity performances. *American Psycho* isolates masculine performance and consumerism to such an extent that Patrick’s serial killings become no different to buying the right face mask – his selfhood is absorbed and devoured by New York City until he is nothing more than surface: “I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours, and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable: but I am simply not there” (Ellis 362).

### III

Clearly, masculine bodies are themselves indicators of performative subjectivity. Versions of hyperreal male bodies are not only confined to literature; perhaps the most striking versions of these ‘hard bodies’ are found on screen. Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” makes it clear that bodies on screen can be read as informers of viewer’s identities, where “pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (Mulvey 6) can turn screen bodies into spaces of eroticism. Scopophilia therefore has the potential to turn something more closely aligned with feminine spaces, into one of masculine eroticism. As Mulvey notes, “the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man’s role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen. The man controls the film phantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle” (Mulvey 10). Transforming the gaze into one of a female viewing a man on screen implies a complication, for does this now imply something effeminate on the receiver of the gaze? Or are male bodies eroticized, contained and conceptualized in ways which render their gender hyperreal?

In the films of the 1990s, spectacular male bodies were transformed into hypermasculine models of overtly visible maleness. With the rise of the body builder action hero of 90s cinema, Arnold Schwarzenegger epitomized the muscular new man – one which appeared modelled on advertising campaigns found in men’s magazines. Much like Patrick Bateman’s commodified selfhood, the manufactured bodies of action film stars undermine the rawness and animalism they seek to reenact through their hyper-visibility. In *Last Action Hero* (1993) Schwarzenegger stars as the character Jack Slater *and* as himself. Premised upon a satirical version of action movie genres, John McTiernan’s film plays with notions of heroic identity and with it, masculinity’s construction on screen. At the start of the film, Jack Slater enters with a Western inspired outfit (complete with cowboy boots and John Wayne swagger), called to a hostage siege on a high rise building. Drawing on a pastiche of other successful action movies such as *Die Hard*, the opening sequence points to our hero’s position as both archetypically masculine and distinctly American (despite Schwarzenegger’s own Austrian nationality). The cowboy boots, big buckle, bulging muscles and causal strut all denote strong, hard and powerful symbols exuded by Slater’s character for his body’s “muscularity is the sign of power—natural, achieved, phallic” (Merck 273). Watching the film along with us, is Danny Madigan (Austin O’Brien) who views Jack Slater’s latest movie from an empty run-down cinema in a crime-ridden area of New York City. There are several ideas at play within the film’s early sequences; namely that we are presented with a father-less child who seeks patriarchal guardianship through a fictional strong man, and also an escape from his bleak environment. *Last Action Hero* therefore represents both a space of watching on

screen, and a space of becoming for the viewer—Danny watches Slater in order to become more of a man's man in the absence of a father figure.

However, this object/subject binary is reversed as the film continues. Danny, with the help of a magical golden ticket, travels into the film world where he meets fictional Jack. After he loses half of his magical ticket to the deadly one-eyed assassin (Charles Dance), Slater and Danny must travel to the real world to retrieve the missing half. Again, various interpretations of this blurring of screen and real spaces are evident – the film as a form of escape for Danny; the screen as a space to project his masculine desires and patriarchal fantasies; and the possibility for hyperreal spaces to take the place of the real. Whilst in the film world, Slater takes Danny to the LA police station, where Danny witnesses both Sharon Stone's *Basic Instinct* character Catherine Tramell smoking a cigarette outside, and *Terminator 2*'s T-1000 in full costume walking through the precinct. This hyperreal moment paves the way for *Last Action Hero*'s insistence on the blurred division between two worlds – the real and the hyperreal, where the film makes references to films within films, and actors meet copies of their film selves. This is most notable in the real world sequences which stand in stark contrast to the technicolor fakery of movie world. Here, Slater becomes nothing more than a “fictional character” who is “imaginary” and whose “whole life has been a damn movie” (McTiernan). Slater in the real world is a form of simulacrum – he is a copy of the real Schwarzenegger, only, as a copy, he is incapable of sustaining the mask of an action hero, suffering life threatening injuries which would otherwise be “flesh wounds”, and thus requiring to be put back into the screen. There is evidence of a clear satirical discourse framing his screen identity for beyond the movie world, Slater is ineffectual; his fictionality renders him mortal and his muscles, ineffective. What *Last Action Hero* makes clear is that when the hyperreal space of the action hero's body is removed, they cannot survive. The performative qualities which render the screen body to be looked at, are impotent, unmaning and ultimately unsuitable as a real body beyond the space of the cinema. Even Danny's quest for patriarchy is revealed as fruitless in the world of simulacrum, determining he must put Slater back into the movie in order for him to exist.

The screen spaces of the cinema are clearly those characterized by the gaze for “[the cinema] is the place of the look... the possibility of varying it, exposing it...” (Merck 32). As a space for looking, Danny's attraction to action cinema renders the type of masculinity he admires as a form of spectacle where “the ‘action’ of action cinema refers to the enactment of spectacle as narrative” (Tasker 6). Without clear narrative, only spectacle, the hyperreal masculinity he desires is one of display “of musculature, of beauty, of physical feats, and of gritty toughness” (Cohan 7) and thereby one of performance and masquerade. Jack Slater/Arnold Schwarzenegger as an idealized male type is representative of “simulacra of an exaggerated masculinity... a casualty of the failure of the paternal signifier and the current crisis in master narratives” (Cohan 232).

Schwarzenegger's body therefore renders his maleness as defined exclusively through physicality and ultimately reduces it to a commodity to be created, copied and bought. As Yvonne Tasker argues, the

visual spectacle of the male body that is central to muscular action films addresses themes of restraint and excess, articulating tension through flexed muscles and promoting the body as a self-created work, constantly being worked over and redefined:

the body builder, obsessed with his appearance... is not a real man... Body building offers the possibility of self-creation in which the intimate space of the body is produced as a raw material to be worked on and over, ultimately for display on a public stage. (Tasker 78)

As a consciously manufactured performance of masculinity and one which is overly concerned with appearance, the spectacle of muscular action heroes seeks validity through the very display of a male body posed, ready for action, refusing passivity. Steve Neale argues that the violence of male action films is another way to refuse the erotic gaze, as in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be explicitly marked as the erotic object of another male's look (Neale). Hence, action heroes must battle, fight and duel in order to repress the possibility of male on male voyeurism. Yet this form of masculinity, in its exaggerated performance of traditional male ideals (power and strength for example), ultimately render the body as object (erotic or otherwise), delineating the subjectivity so closely bound to traditional masculinity. The body builder is self-created, his body is for the purpose of exhibition rather than autonomy, and it is, ironically the excessive posturing of a muscular frame that renders their maleness as artificial. Paradoxically, muscles are indicators of natural masculinity, yet, here their overdevelopment, especially on screen, mean that they now come to represent simulacrum. Muscular bodies of male action heroes are therefore a construction, worn as exterior and their position on screen denotes a permanent visibility as performative. These particular masculine bodies, prolific in 1990s culture as 'heroes' of action cinema, appear as sites of consumption, commodification and manufacture, permanently bound to a particular and recognizable form of masculinity.

#### IV

Masculinity is a position, a mode or performance expressing aspects of power—whether it be through consumption or commodification. As performances, these male bodies' poses remain contained by 'imagined identities'—idealized models through which the modern man can give meaning to his relationship with a culture rooted in consumerism and capitalism. The gaze appears to mediate between identity formation and the impossibility of identity in a period characterized by its increased investment in hyperreal American spaces, filled with imagery from technology, media and consumer culture. The 1990s appears to conflate issues of masculinity, where new wars (such as the Gulf War) and the ongoing growth of capitalism drove a subconscious need for 'hard bodies' to represent American strength, values and power. Paradoxically, the cracks in these hard exteriors evident in the literature produced at the time, suggests that performativity might give rise to an unknowable, uncontrollable and dangerous form of masculinity hidden beneath the surface. Performativity, whilst seemingly preferable to natural maleness, suggests representations of masculinity were politically motivated. The

proliferation of white male bodies on screen and their position as, overwhelmingly, heroes, suggests an agenda in line with the thawing of the Cold War and the national political swing to the right. A form of masculinity which wants to be looked at (or even gazed at), can be considered and embraced as representative of American culture, mirroring a plethora of cultural signifiers most fitting for a nation whose investment in media and technology directly contributed to a boost in the nation's economy. The overriding whiteness of action heroes in 1990s cinema suggests the creation of a visible and powerful American male force which often tackled foreign powers (*Rambo II*, *Rocky III*, *Commando*). These hard bodies are therefore politicized in their performativity, reflecting and reacting to cultural, spatial and visual stimuli. Lastly, this type of masculinity, whether it be the hard body of heroes or the hard shell of a non-self (such as Patrick Bateman), results in the diminution of the boundaries between public and private. In both of the examples above, there is no real sense of privacy, for if their identities remain constructed by society and culture, then they are always public. Equally, by being public, what little remains of the private may be permanently invisible rendering it once again formidable. Perhaps systematic of the increased presence of surveillance technology and strategies exercised in America during the 1990s (such as the ECHELON program), these masculine bodies point to the destruction of male identity in an age of increased technological connectivity.

Returning once again to Sherry Turkle, our contemporary period is one which offers yet more complex gauntlets for male bodies to navigate. Turkle reported one individual she interviewed felt as though "he became his device" (Turkle 152) where he was permanently "tethered to the internet" (153). In an age of online platforms which promote the visibility of the individual (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, YouTube, Vimeo), it would seem the persistence of performative identity is far from obsolete. Rather, there exist new lenses, new surfaces and yet more spaces for us to mirror in order to find a culturally acceptable selfhood.

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**Antonia Mackay** is an Associate Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University and Visiting Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has taught on a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate modules including: American Theatre, American Vistas, Critical Theory, Narrative and Narratology, Special Options in Avant Gardes, Contemporary Literature and Twentieth Century Literature. She has published articles on space, technology and identity, and is co-editor of the upcoming collection *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves* (Palgrave, 2017). In 2014 and 2016 she won the Nigel Messenger Teaching Award at Oxford Brookes.

Email: [antonimackay@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:antonimackay@brookes.ac.uk)

## Refugeehood and its Discontents: Configurations of Sri Lankan Identity across the Nation States

Meenu Chaudhary, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, Delhi

“... Wandering mongrel  
 dog-tired, prone in bed,  
 scavenging for a living  
 his days crawl (...)  
 He, a mortgaged title deed  
 trapped in the village VIP’s chest  
 orphaned in his native land.  
 A refugee in foreign lands (...)  
 Abandoned, without home or hearth  
 A wretch,  
 He weeps silently with the snowy evening.”

—V.I.S. Jayapalan, 309-310

The island of Sri Lanka has been the receptacle of several contested histories and contending nationalist ideologies which have defined and overpowered any other interpretive frameworks to examine Sri Lankan identity. The unprecedented scale at which the civil war has been fought has engendered innumerable casualties and has produced countless displaced and dislocated selves. It is significant that the maneuvering of primordial views regarding ethnicity and race were utilized by the ethnic groups to validate and justify the present enmity and thus inculcate a unified Sinhala or Tamil identity that brushed over the cast/class hierarchies embedded in both the groups. Resultantly, the histories of the marginal figures such as the refugee, the displaced and the detainee are silenced to legitimize violence and ethnic discrimination.

To interrogate this, an interdisciplinary approach has been adopted so as to analyze literary narratives through several fields of study such as anthropology, political theory and refugee studies. The project seeks to examine the changing nature of belonging and identity by taking into account the inconsistencies, elisions and revisions of the Sinhalese and the Tamil identity-formations and thus explore the nexus of history and politics determining the conflict. For figures officially designated as IDP (Internally Displaced Person), refugees and asylum seekers, the association between “patial attachment” and identity is indispensable to examine the modalities of violence inflicted on them—the quintessential “other”. In this regard, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s work on the role played by places, place-connectedness, and identity is remarkable as it highlights home as not merely a unit which is

territorialized and demarcated by the nation-state rather is seen as an “anthropocentric” (Tuan 150) entity. Thus, belonging insinuates a tangible and physical reality that gathers significance through lived and personalized experience.

The multiple taking and shedding of identities shall be analyzed from another point of view with an emphasis on the status of the refugee and the asylum seeker within the nation-states whose liminality bring to focus several inconsistencies and assumptions (of refuge giving countries) that have often created barriers in providing humanitarian assistance. The fiction of Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic writer Shobasakthi dexterously portrays the paraphernalia demanded by the states in endowing visa to determine the petitioner as a genuine or a false refugee. By minutely observing the repetitive petitioning, asylum seeker interviews and the growing despondency of the enquirer, Shobasakthi's work makes an original contribution in unveiling the apathy of the refugee rehabilitation programmes as well as the desperate forging of refugee documents by the asylum seeker in the wake of rejection. The production of fake documents and the struggle to survive and strategize about asylum interviews are some of the excruciating moments that await the arrival of a refugee. The texts that will be analyzed in this light are the novella *Gorilla* (Shobasakthi 1) and a short story titled “A Testimony of Numbers” (Shobasakthi 177).

In this context, the insights provided by Zygmunt Bauman and Ranabir Samaddar in the field of refugee studies become crucial inputs to delineate the exclusionary principles upon which the granting of the asylum functions with regard to the nation-states. The increasing visibility of these liminal figures destabilizes the presumption creating the semblance of any homogenous whole or the solidity of national identities. These threshold figures enable us to explore the changing significations of home and identity amidst the war-ravaged lands and dislocated psyches.

### **Distorted selves and displaced belonging**

Yi-Fu Tuan, in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, argues that the nature of human experience and attachment are symbolic of deeper relations that are established with the objects exuding familiarity. He suggests:

Intimate experiences, not being dressed up, easily escape our attention. At the same time we do not say “this is it,” as we do when we admire objects of conspicuous or certified beauty. It is only in reflection that we recognize their worth. At the same time we are not aware of any drama; we do not know that the seeds of lasting sentiment are being planted. Humble events can in time build up a strong sentiment for place. (143)

The story “A Testimony of Numbers” highlights the impossibility of reliving and repossessing ideas of home and homeland once they are shattered, an enterprise that ends in absolute isolation. The dramatic opening comprising disconnected sentences and inconsequential phrases deliberately belies the tragic dimension of the story for it is subsequently revealed that the speaker due to perpetual shifting,

dislocations, state torture and subsequent migration to Paris ends up with a deranged mind with only a few memories of his home as his constant companion. Shobasakthi's usage of objective and descriptive narration divests the narrative of any superficial emotional investment thereby, further aggravating the deranged man's alienation. During one of his routine visits to a Parisian doctor, he screams:

'The numbers are flying, exploding against each other and this time, their vibrations dug their way into the soles of my feet. There was smoke coming out of my eyes.' Doctor, let me go!' I cried out in pain. 'The numbers are getting blown up inside me. Don't let me burn'. (Shobasakthi 178)

The numbers against which the man tussles are the legacies of civil war which refuse to leave his being. More than his lived experiences, his life as reflected in the story is governed by a veritable litany of digits – numbers of identity card, numbers embossed on a prisoner, number of the migrant self. Personified, these numbers take on horrifying proportions and constantly interrupt any attempt at meaning-making activities. These numbers acquire unprecedented importance in a war ravaged country like Sri Lanka where they signify not only the biographical details rather the numbers, in an increasingly militarized setting, testify one's belonging, allegiance and identity. Thus, the shedding and the taking-on of several fabricated selves unmoor him completely. The man is a classic case of an asylum seeker who can never match up to the stringent criteria of asylum seeking procedures and so, repeatedly fails to clear his interview despite the meticulous workings of several agents. The challenge posited by his condition goes a long way to critique the minute detailing and strenuous processes of acquiring asylum in a nation-state. Leaving behind his childhood memories and clinging on to some of them becomes the only way of finding refuge, albeit by losing his sanity. For him, forging of a new identity based on false documents is akin to losing an indispensable part of his self and the sense of belongingness.

Tuan reflects on the paradox that inevitably accompanies the remembrance and acknowledgment of homeland. He suggests, "Here is a seeming paradox: thought creates distance and destroys the immediacy of direct experience, yet it is by thoughtful reflection that the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in reality and gain a measure of permanence" (148). He adds:

Home is the center of an astronomically determined spatial system. A vertical axis, linking heaven to the underworld, passes through it.... home is the focal point of a cosmic structure. Such a conception of place ought to give it supreme value; to abandon it would be hard to imagine. Should destruction occur we may reasonably conclude that the people should be thoroughly demoralized, since the ruin of their settlement implies the ruin of their cosmos. (149)

It follows that the destruction of his cosmos and the resulting insanity ironically transforms him as a refugee who requires refuge both from his native country and from his own imbalanced self. His childish babble against the agent's attempt at persuading him for another interview can be seen as an attempt to imagine a permanent refuge from the uncertainty embedded in petitions and applications. He says, "This time I refused to have anything with the burdensome numbers.' If you want to hang on

to the numbers, then do so. The sea, the paintings and my cousin Megalai are filled with life. I am the sea, I am the paintings, I am my cousin Megalai ...' I told them firmly" (189).

Termed as a "loose nut" (189), his perpetual relapse into hallucinations at one level defines his mental and physical trauma engendered by repeated imposition of a fraud identity in an alien land. At another level, the difficulty of suppressing home memories and substituting them with numbers, documentary proofs and identity markers is a defiance as well as a reminder of the bureaucratic violence inflicted on outsiders that is central to the functioning of the nation-states. In this sense, the recurrent motif of insanity signals to both literal and figurative psychosis-the mental imbalance and the madness of extremes forms of documentation and surveillance foundational to the exercise of reason and rationality of modern-nation states. As Michael Agier insinuates, the loss of identity of the refugee involves the uprooting:

[of] the media on which social existence rests, that is a set of ordinary of things and persons that carry meanings – land, house, village, city, parents, possessions, jobs and other daily landmarks. These creatures in drift and waiting have nothing but their naked life, whose continuation depends on humanitarian assistance. (Agier 94)

The transient nature of their belonging and their uprooted identity becomes the overarching feature defining their status as refugees. Lying outside the law, the asylum-seeker, the migrant and the refugee constitute the other as against the legitimate, legal member of the nation-state. The stateless being is thus a deviant in every sense and the one who is a liability.

### **Nation-State and its Margins**

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, in his work, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* draws several associations between the reducing power and sovereignty of the nation-states in the wake of globalization and transnational migratory flows and its adverse impact on the status of the refugee figure. The production of borders and the pervading violence in all forms have resulted in these "human casualties" who have been transformed into "human wastes" (Bauman 63, 70). As the stronghold sustained by the nation-states over their populations began to shrink giving way to insidious networks of crime and proliferation of international syndicates or the "global over-class", their sovereignty also manifested in other ways wherein the persecution has now shifted from the distant to the available, that is, these unfinished selves who have become "uniquely suitable for the role of the effigy to be burnt" (64, 66). As David Garland argues on the tendency of criminalizing and social ordering:

The penal code becoming more prominent has become punitive, more expressive, more security-minded while the welfare mode... becoming more muted, has become more conditional, more offence-centred, more risk conscious. The offenders are now less likely to be represented in official

discourse as socially deprived citizens in need of support. They are depicted instead as culpable, undeserving and somewhat dangerous individuals. (qtd. in Bauman 34)

Thus, the resuscitation and acquired empowerment of the nation-states works in tandem with the logic of inducing paranoia and fear amongst the dispossessed.

On the same lines, the grim tale of *Gorilla* weaves the anxiety, frustration and the resentment of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum petitioner Jacob Anthony Thasan whose foray into the ranks of LTTE and his subsequent branding of traitor repeatedly plays havoc with his asylum seeking procedures. Gorilla aka Anthony Thasan's life becomes a series of lies, manipulations and fictitious identities on the basis of which Thasan validates his application. His adoption of someone else's self to legitimize his stay is a stark example of the predicament of several Sri Lankan Tamils stranded in foreign countries on the account of their complex motivations war-torn histories that could never fit into the demarcations and the critical scrutiny to which these petitions were subjected. The fractured life led by Thasan as elaborated by Shobasakthi is portrayed as a prelude to the imminent rejection that always awaits him precisely for the reason of his tainted past and conflicted loyalties and motivations, a case that refuses to be filtered and neatly compartmentalized into the dictionary definitions of international refugee laws. The vigilance exercised by the granting agencies is a reflection of the suspicions cast over his antecedents and the ethical void attending them. A boy abused by his thug father, his identity as a child combatant and the unjustified and disgraceful ousting from the LTTE organization, his impoverished life as a refugee in Paris—all these vignettes refer to the entangled lives lived by Thasan that could never find any place in his application for the one sin of having once challenged the state machinery, thus, turning him from the persecuted to the suspicious tramp. Besides the legal hindrances, the ghettoization of refugees and the strict separation of the legal occupants from the illegal ones mark them as aliens and outsiders.

Regarding the insensitivity and systemic violence implemented by the nation-states regarding refugees and economic migrants, Bauman argues:

... governments prefer to unleash popular animosity against petty crimes than to engage in the battles that are likely to drag on without end ... virtually bound to be lost. Seeking Public Enemy Number One among the hapless immigrants of the banlieues and asylum seekers' camps is considerably more opportune and expedient. With more effect and less expense, the immigrant districts teeming with prospective pickpockets and muggers can be used as the battlefield of the great war for law and order. (63-4)

The "broken-down lodging house" which has "just enough space to stack six coffins next to each other", highlights the condition of the illegal immigrants (Shobasakthi 125). Thasan's resentment against the exclusivist criteria and the hostility of the nation-state spills over to his fellow Tamil refugees who are hostile towards the likes of Thasan and their political trajectory. On being titled as a false refugee appealing for political asylum in France, he wails, "What is he saying? That I am a false



refugee while he, who ran away to France fourteen years ago even before the first bomb fell is a genuine refugee? ... Are you saying that lacking a visa and employment, I deserve having to spend my days hiding out in terror?" (146).

Thasan's tirade against the fellow refugees underscores his apprehensions of being considered a fake petitioner. When read in the light of having encountered innumerable rejections, his comment reveals the surveillance established by the international humanitarian refugee agencies in the form of detentions, persecution and arduous asylum-seeking procedures. Such a Kafkaesque process of collecting documentary proofs is always accompanied by fear, anxiety as well as resentment. As the case of Thasan shows, the rigmarole of denials and rejections gives rise to lies, fake applications and forged documents in order to procure some semblance of stability and permanence. The desperation of survival and the need for employment, thus, compels his companions to forge identity cards, replace photographs and fabricate the details of the passport (148-149).

Thus, Shobasakthi, by interweaving a pattern of legal persecution and illegal production of identity-proving certificates, underlines governmental apathy and the despair of the liminal figures that are forced to summarise their life-histories within the limited space of a refugee application. His revolutionary zeal towards the creation of Tamil Eelam does not fit into the hierarchy driven and order-obeying guerilla life within LTTE. Referred as a traitor and betrayer for justifiably not obeying his superiors, he is inevitably an enemy of the state. At the same time, the detection methods of the state apparatus of France also judge him as an illegal occupant unworthy of any refugee protection.

According to Ranabir Samaddar, in his work "Power, Fear, Ethics", the constitutional constraints and legal proceedings defining rehabilitation programs and international conventions for refugees such as UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council) "limits our capacity to resolve conflicts and generate an ethic of care, kindness, hospitality, and responsibility" (Samaddar 26). He examines the ambiguities and loopholes of humanitarian politics and the empowered status of the nation-states in granting refuge to the persecuted since within the regimented codes and tenacious pursuit of definitions "the subject of refugee studies turns into an object - an object that is at once a *deficit* and a *supplement*" (18).

Consequently, lapses of memory, inarticulate utterances or gaps and inaccuracy regarding time and place within the narrative become legitimate grounds of the rejection of refugee status. Besides the issue of incomprehension faced by Thasan, his bulleted petition unveils the frantic effort of balancing factuality with the fictional through which the language (which has been repeatedly contoured and refined) reflects neither an excess nor an inadequacy of data that may expose and filter the actual threat from the potential one. The objective, linear and unsentimental account required by the agencies belies the contingencies of the war in general and Thasan's fragmented past in particular. Despite the rigorous methods adopted by him, his plea unintentionally addresses the indifference of the concerned authorities, an anathema which can never be undone. He remarks:

you have thrice refused my application for asylum. The police has sent me a letter ordering me to leave France immediately. Where do I go?... your explanation is that I face no specific danger. You have argued that the perilous nature of life that all Sri Lankan Tamils face in Sri Lanka is similar to my condition and therefore I cannot be given political asylum according to the law ... I am unable to provide you with official documentation of my sufferings. Sir, in my country, the military does not cut up a Tamil and then give a certificate to the injured saying, 'We cut you.' Though there is a strong political reason for when the gun is aimed at us, often we can never ascertain precisely the individual circumstances motivating the release of that particular bullet. (1-2)

The application reveals the flaws inherent in refugee laws that emphasize the non-political cause of the oppression suffered by the refugee. Thasan's careful erasure of his arms training and LTTE days in the form does not elide the fact that he remains an outlaw declared by the Sri Lankan state and, thus, is a potential political prisoner. Samaddar argues about the ambiguities of such clauses suggesting that, "The inability to understand the new imperatives and implications reflects the crisis of the liberal principles that underlie the moral economy of refuge today—an economy characterized by language of protection and ground reality of rejection" (21).

Here, the underlying principle governing the nature of the empowered (nation-state) and the powerless (immigrant) is the authority constructing the benchmarks of who deserves the care of the nation-state. The fear instilled by the granter works simultaneously with the professed claims of protection and care since the "hallmark of a modern regime, has made this combination possible, how it has made fear operate in unison with an arrangement of care" (21). The flourishing industry of forged documents and buying-selling of certificates amidst Sri Lankan diasporic Tamils is a response to such anxieties of deportation and the fear of refusal. The stability aspired for through the adoption of illegal networks has implications for redefining the concept of identity within the discipline of cultural studies. Here, the institutional forms of identity and identification are configured through the contingent, the conflictual and the fragmentary. Thus, the dynamics of identity can be approached via the routes undertaken by the diasporic subject - one being documentary citizenry entailing mobility, access to amenities and social visibility. In this sense, cultural relations are being continually reformulated as they are exposed to new forms of articulation. As suggested before, the ever-growing nexus of agents and touts reveals the discrepancies behind the logic of difference and otherness constructed as absolute and immutable. Besides the contingent nature of identity construction, the power and the concomitant fear governing the relations of the giver and the procurer underscore the duality of the circular argument:

... where on one hand fear may not lead to care for it has not been legally measured as adequate to be deserving of care, on the other hand the lending of fear to legal measurement has permanently tied care to measuring fear, and therefore to a substantial measure has impaired care. (23-24)

The fear of numbers as discussed with regard to the story “A Testimony of Numbers” highlights the paranoia of the deranged man who is subjected to countless preparations pertaining to his interviews. He reflects:

However perfectly these men prepared a passport for me with sharply defined names and numbers, the moment I saw Singapore Airport authorities, I would begin to tremble. Their questionings would begin with my passport and after squeezing to the final drop even the details about the agent who was trying to help me leave, they would finally kick me out of the airport. (186)

The terror of state authorities never leaves the man be it in Sri Lanka or outside its boundaries as it undergoes several mutations. The need for validating one’s account works simultaneously with the suppression of all the identity-constituting elements which do not correspond to a perfect testimony of violence and discrimination. As Samaddar comments:

The role of the judge thus changes gradually from a recipient of request to an interrogator of grounds, who arrogates to himself the sovereign authority to interpret, assess and declare the past pain of the refugee and his fear of future torture ... it must match up to the language of law, justice and the judge; if not, the refugee is lying. If the refugee is inarticulate, he is not in fear. The outcome of this translation of fear into knowledge and then reason, is the extreme injustice to one who in fear had sought shelter... (23-24)

For the insane person, the political incarceration carries itself even outside Sri Lanka turning into structural violence (of refugee laws, petitions etcetera) that is inflicted on him time and again. In a bid to stage a modest appeal and cross the labyrinthine legal obstacles, fear is translated into fabrication to be evaluated by the state officials. He says:

... my uncle... had become a self-taught expert in agency work, and prepared an L836753 for me. I learned all the names and numbers until my brain ran dry. My name, language, birth, paintings, my grandfather, seashore, village—everything becoming a lie, I began my L836753....

Finally, after roaming through all the loopholes and roadways of the Asylum Act, for two thousand francs, he fixed my feet on top of my head and bound and burdened them with a thousand numbers that referred to dates, months, years, as if they were automobile identifications....

.... My aunt advised me to just forget everything—the sea, the stick, the net, the painting, my cousin Megalai, singing, Mahara prison, everything. Otherwise, it seems, there would be no asylum card. (186-187)

The rupturing of the self and the fracturing of Sri Lankan identity in the wake of competing nationalisms have been the running thread of the article. With the elimination of the Tamil militancy in 2009, the statist claims of eradicating terrorism need to be critically assessed against the increasing militarization of the state post the civil war. The potential threat of army violence on the one hand and the avowal of peace building processes on the other hand, indicate the legacy of war which has seeped

into the very texture of Sri Lankan landscape. In this context, a sensitive understanding of post-colonial nation-formation and the intricacies of ethnic affiliations can bring about a paradigm shift in dealing with the phenomena of population flows and the production of fragmented identities within the nation-states.

It follows that the mediations of identity are necessarily chaotic and function across several social, historical and political sites. In the wake of refugee crisis, the claims of multicultural existence and tokenisms regarding plurality and tolerance, there is a requirement to remap patterns of identity within cultural studies by looking at the modalities of power and social agency that have come to govern cultural relations. It is relevant to invoke Paul Gilroy's argument on "rethinking cultural difference though notions of hierarchy and hegemony" (Gilroy 394). The tools for decentring the essentialist understandings of identity and belonging as legitimised by the nation-states can be provided by rethinking "cultural identity a premise of political action rather than a substitute for it" (394).

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**Meenu Chaudhary** completed her M. Phil in English from Delhi University and is currently working as Assistant Professor in Delhi University. Her research interests include refugee studies and diaspora with special focus on South Asian migrations. She has delivered conference papers concerning Sri Lankan diaspora and the concomitant debates on the conflicted histories of Sri Lankan ethnic

nationalisms. Her intellectual engagement is aimed at exploring the dynamics of exile through the frames of statelessness, war economies and international security.

meenuchaudhary281@gmail.com

## Mixed Identity, *Star Trek*, and Cultural Studies: A Politics of Mixing

Angus Young, PhD Research Scholar, The University of Leeds

The revival of *Star Trek* in the late 1980s, peaking through the 1990s, coincided with the emergence of Mixed Race Studies as a distinct academic discipline. I suggest both the show and the discipline share certain postmodern, poststructuralist impulses. Most prominently, an appreciation of uncertainty and the challenges posed to stability, linearity, and binary understanding are central to mixed race theory and *Star Trek*. This unsettling, I argue, “enter[s] the politics of the end of the essential black subject [...] and] plunge[s us] headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism.” (Hall “New” 445) However, I wish to extend this framework that Stuart Hall constructs in “New Ethnicities” (1989), as Mixed Race Studies and *Star Trek* negotiate not just the end of the essential black subject but the end of the essential subject. I will propose that Mixed Race Studies and *Star Trek* operate through a critical politics in which representations of identity are contradictory and unguaranteed. In this sense, both the discipline and the show are continuously contingent, as they rely not on the biological or inherent necessity of race but its real social practice. This emphasis on practice and contingency is distilled by Hall in the language of “identification” as opposed to identity (*Questions* 2-3).

Hall goes on in “New Ethnicities” to suggest that this ‘maelstrom’ demands a “politics [...] be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities” (445). I propose that the manner in which Mixed Race Studies and *Star Trek* sustain contradictions, combining opposing, unsettled conceptions of identity within single bodies, offers the foundations for such a politics. In other words, by rendering identity as insecure, the end of the essential subject, a constant mutability is engendered that enables the potential for multidirectional shared senses of reality. The cost of this multiplicity, though, is a perpetual contingency in which social relations can never be whole or settled but only realised in variable practice. Furthermore, such a politics without the essential subject necessarily breaks from the biologic, genetic emphasis implied in terms such as ‘heterogeneity’.

I suggest Hall, Mixed Race Studies, and *Star Trek* employ, in Nathaniel Coleman’s understanding of the phrase, “utopian thinking” (358) when they lay the foundations for a “future [...] no place, good place” (Gordin et. al. 1). They all outline potential anti-essential spaces, where identities are individuated, which are possible to imagine but impossible to actualise, as they continue to rely on identities being practiced homogenously. However, I argue the operations of anti-essential thinking can still provide a basis not to realise utopia but to harness a fruitful utopian impulse and move social discourses progressively forward. “Demanding the impossible may inevitably end in disappointment,” Coleman

writes, “but doing so takes the first steps toward other possibilities” (355). Utopian (and dystopian) thinking is understood here as a practice, in Michael D. Gordin et. al.’s terms, “as styles of imagination, as approaches to radical change” (5). I will propose the initial steps of the utopian, radical endeavour to think beyond essential identities can be made by reframing Hall’s critical politics into a politics of mixing. This would be a more active and socially productive version of the ‘politics of criticism’, which seeks alternative, more mutable means of social organisation. Lawrence Grossberg’s recent reengagement with Deleuze and Guattari’s theories emphasises the necessity for Cultural Studies, in particular, to embrace such unstable multiplicity (2014; 2016).

In setting out this alternative politics, I first trace the tensions at the heart of Mixed Race Studies alongside the utopian efforts to resolve these challenges. I then analyse *Star Trek*’s representations of mixed identity through mixed species characters and how these renderings both reproduce and problematise certain tropes identified in mixed race theory. These contradictory, unstable representations are further explored as a critical politics that has shaped the discourses of *Star Trek* Studies. I then expand the notion of mixing into other identities, specifically cyborg identity. Finally, the practice of mixing is suggested as a potential foundation for an anti-essentialist social reality; a paradoxical ‘no place’ space of tangled, inconsistent relations. This article thus outlines an alternative means of framing, imagining, and understanding social organisation that could be employed as a step in the progressive effort to realise a pragmatic anti-essentialism.

### ***Mixed Race Studies and Utopian Impulses***

The core instability of mixed race theory stems from a series of principal questions: Who is/isn’t mixed race? Is anything shared as a mixed race experience? Is articulating multiraciality politically useful or unhelpful? Is mixed the right word? Is race? Various scholars have managed to pin down coherent and influential positions in this potential minefield, usually through a process of distilling discussions to a specific space and time (see King-O’Riain). The relative youthfulness of Mixed Race Studies, though, continues to invite broader examinations of its underlying structure and concepts.

This sense of a continuing foundational debate is outlined by Molly Littlewood McKibbin in the 2014 inaugural (and only) edition of the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* (JCMRS 183-202). But it can also be seen in the influential Mixed Race Studies’ essay collections that have framed the debates dominating the discipline; such as, David Parker and Miri Song’s *Rethinking Mixed Race* (2001), Jayne Ifekunwigwe’s *Mixed Race Studies: A Reader* (2004), Rebecca King-O’Riain et. al.’s *Global Mixed Race* (2014). Although critical discussions of multiraciality find roots at least as far back as the early twentieth-century (if not the mid-nineteenth), as Ifekunwigwe’s collection traces, there is still, in McKibbin’s terms, an “ongoing theorization of multiracialism” (JCMRS 183). I suggest, indeed, that this theorisation is ongoing as the multiplicity of multiraciality entails a fundamental irresolution. There is a seeming indefiniteness found at the heart of the discipline, in the debates over terminology (see Ifekunwigwe’s reasoning for

dropping ‘métis(se)’ in Parker and Song 43-46) and whether parameters should, or even can, be set (a question explored throughout *Global Mixed Race*). Even the suggestion of there being a mixed race discipline has been met with strong opposition by critics such as Lewis R. Gordon (in Ifekunwigwe 158-165).

This irresolution at the core of Mixed Race Studies is brought to the fore in G. Reginald Daniel et. al.’s proposal that “the current moment calls upon scholars to assess the merit of arguments made over the last twenty years” (JCMRS 6). I suggest that this need to assess merit stems from a fundamental tension, in Rainier Spencer’s terms: “the internal contradiction of multiracial identity politics” (Ifekunwigwe 220). Steven Masami Ropp specifies this contradiction:

In the emerging literature on ‘multiracial’ studies, there is this reluctant but almost inevitable use of such terms as multiracial, biracial, and mixed-race even when trying to deconstruct or write against racialized thinking. Even when attempting to transcend race it is necessary to continue to refer to racial categories and racial logic which leads to a reinscription of race albeit in more sophisticated hybrid and multiplied forms. (Ifekunwigwe 264)

The problem identified by critics such as Spencer and Ropp seems to echo challenges repeatedly outlined by Hall: “Looking at new conceptions of identity requires us also to look at re-definitions of the forms of politics which follow from that: the politics of difference, the politics of self-reflexivity, a politics that is open to contingency but still able to act.” (“Minimal” 45) In the context of Mixed Race Studies, the question raised is whether discourses can move beyond ‘racialised thinking’, be open to contingency, while still being ‘able to act’ against ongoing racist practices?

There have been suggestions, particularly in popular media and the aims of certain mixed race activist groups (see Spencer JCMRS 162-182), that multiraciality is inherently an enactment of a ‘post-racial’ society. George G. Sanchez problematises such representations, “investing that sort of utopian power in the genetic mixing of our era only serves to heighten a new form of racial essentialism and once again to frame the process of overcoming racial hierarchy as a fundamentally biological one.” (Ifekunwigwe 277) Again, the problem implied by Sanchez is how to move beyond racial essentialism without overlooking racial practices. Minelle Mahtani describes the ‘post-racial’, positive simplifications of mixed race identity as the ‘romanticisation of multiraciality’. She challenges the logic behind this eulogising while also showing its disconnect to actual lived experiences.

While Mahtani makes an important and necessary intervention, she still engages in a subtler form of mixed race romanticising:

multiracial identities have been historically characterized as either pathologized or celebrated. Both positions are suffused with a particular kind of anxiety. Critical mixed race theory has not yet confronted this epistemic binary. It is only through this confrontation that a new political and progressive space for liberatory multiracial politics will emerge. (44)



I suggest the romantic formation here is the conception of a ‘new space’. Echoing Ropp’s critique of the language of Mixed Race Studies, I argue the terminology of new spaces, borders, boundaries, and so forth are problematic in their reinscription of set racial categorisations.

The most prominent example of such a romantic conception of multiraciality is Homi Bhabha’s ‘Third Space’ and understanding of ‘hybridity’ as a progressive liminality. In direct opposition to Bhabha, Robert Young in *Colonial Desire* (1995) reads ‘hybridity’ as “repeating its own [colonial] cultural origins” (23). As Mark Christian (Ifekunwigwe 309) and Paul Spickard point out (Parker and Song 93), though, ‘hybridity’ is an ill-defined term loaded by Bhabha and Young with a presumed positivity or negativity. Both Bhabha and Young seek to pin down multiraciality through ‘hybridity’ as having an essential reading, either deconstructing or reinforcing colonial power structures respectively. However, following the critical discussions in Mixed Race Studies that have continued beyond Bhabha and Young, I suggest Spickard’s conclusion, “I cannot agree fully with either” (Parker and Song 94), is inevitable. Instead, I propose to adhere to G. Reginald Daniel’s suggestion that “the goal should be to move beyond Eurocentrism and radical Afrocentrism in order to embrace a new ‘holocentric’ (or postmodern) paradigm based on ‘both/neither,’ which would come closer to the actual ‘truth.’” (Ifekunwigwe 284) In other words, the utopian, holocentric, impulse is to find an unromantic, mixed, both/neither resolution between Bhabha and Young in which multiraciality is not intrinsically ‘celebrated’, ‘pathologised’, or essentialised.

Mahtani further problematises ‘hybridity’: “the term ‘hybridity’ suggests a combination of two seemingly pure things, indicating how each is defined with respect to the other. Most often these dualisms are imagined as opposites.” (40) Bhabha’s language, in particular, emphasises such dualisms even when challenging them. Whether it is the “dual economy” (Bhabha xiv) or the binarisms, “public and private [...] high and low” (Bhabha 3), these terms, much like ‘multiracial’, repeat the logic of already established categories that, for Bhabha, seem to only be contended in liminal encounters. Setting the mixed individual in such a ‘hybrid’ construction reinscribes a sense of wholeness, or ‘purity’, either side of boundary lines. In so doing, the people inhabiting these in between spaces are rendered as detached and exceptional. The problem I propose in Mahtani’s framework is the sense of ‘newness’, as it entails this same detachment. Bhabha stresses “newness” as a progressive means of “going beyond” (10) present boundaries, but this ‘beyond’ enacts a displacement of mixed identity as ‘other’. ‘Newness’ engenders a disconnection that invariably implies either positive or negative abnormality, in a similar manner to ‘hybridity’ or ‘pathologising’ and ‘celebrating’. It also invokes the tendency to dehistoricise and see multiraciality as, in Mahtani’s own rebuking terms, “emblems of a utopic future” (6).

While defining ‘pathologising’ and ‘celebrating’ representations of multiraciality, Mahtani suggests, “Both paradigms – the torn and confused stereotype of the multiracial subject and the ‘best of both worlds’ ideology – are troubling because of the way they uphold traditional racial logics” (47). This

troubling is caused by the anti-essentialist implications of multiraciality, which Mahtani outlines (156), undermining such traditional racial logic. As Danzy Senna indicates, essentialism is inevitably problematised in mixed race discourses: “we’ve decided on this one word, ‘multiracial,’ to describe, in effect, a whole nation of diverse people who have absolutely no relation, cultural or otherwise, to one another.” (Ifekunwigwe 205) Mixed Race Studies’ challenging of essentialised racial logic while still needing to recognise racial practices leads, then, to a paradoxical situation: to articulate multiraciality is to classify a group that does not exist, to not articulate multiraciality is to fail to acknowledge people that do exist. This paradox points, with Ropp and the deficiencies associated with the terms ‘hybridity’, ‘newness’, and ‘multiracial’, to a problem of language.

The term ‘mixing’, I suggest, provides an alternative. ‘Hybrid’ is used in *Star Trek* to define mixed identity but, as already suggested, this is a problematic term. ‘Biracial’ has also been rejected as it is divisive, reductive, and implicitly reprioritises whiteness in a black/white binary understanding that most contemporary mixed race theory problematises. ‘Multiracial’ may, in the end, be the term that is taken forward in mixed race theory as it is potentially less reminiscent of the cocktail interpretations (reductive, exotic, experimental) of being mixed race. However, I use ‘mixed’, or rather ‘mixing’, in order to think beyond the essential racial subject and outline a sense of continuous contingency in all living. In other words, ‘mixing’, as a verb that does not have race built into it, offers a wider set of possible routes of critical enquiry and suggests an active, ongoing negotiation. As I will clarify in the final section of this article, ‘mixing’ refers to the mixing of contingent, unsettled senses of reality that are always in process. In this manner, I suggest ‘mixing’ is a term that can delineate what the end of the essential subject means in practice.

Mahtani goes on to describe the spaces mixed race people inhabit as “mobile paradoxical spaces” (167). She elucidates that this inhabitation, the practice of mixing, is a state of being “located in several social spaces at the same time – within the centres and the margins – simultaneously” (171). The shift I wish to make to Mahtani’s framework is to remove the exceptionality and the newness. I propose that there is only one already existing paradoxical space in which we all, whether identifying as mixed or not, are living in. While I will justify this claim through an analysis of *Star Trek*, and specifically cyborg identity, I suggest the troubling of identity categorisations in many discourses, such as Transgender Studies, Queer Theory, Disability Studies, or Migration Studies, are already outlining this space. This landscape, echoing certain mixed race practices as defined by Mahtani, is at once interconnected and whole while simultaneously being divided into several unstable social spaces.

The recurring problem running through these critical debates, in Hall, ‘hybridity’, and Mixed Race Studies, is whether we can move beyond racial logic in a manner that still recognises race as a real social practice. This challenge invites utopian thinking, I suggest, as it demands the imagining of a future good place that is invariably no place. Science fiction offers a means to analyse such imagined possibilities. *Star Trek*, specifically, directly engages with discourses on race, presents a history in which

to investigate how such utopian race-based thinking has changed over the past fifty years, and renders a theoretically 'post-racial' world that is still often mired in racial logic. I will argue, though, that *Star Trek*, like Mixed Race Studies, operates through a utopian impulse to imagine the impossible, which is productive even in its failings as it offers a discursive engagement with alternative politics. Indeed, it is the ambitious nature of utopian thinking that accounts for this tendency to outline alternatives: "After all," as Gordin et. al note, "utopias and dystopias by definition seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level. They address root causes and offer revolutionary solutions." (2) Through the exploration of such revolutionary solutions, I will propose a different language for negotiating identity categorisation and organisation, a politics of mixing, that seeks to move beyond racial logic while continuing to recognise and counter racist practice.

### **Star Trek: *Mixed Identity as War and Peace***

The unsettled representation of mixed identity as divided and whole, implied in both the practice of mixing and the discourses of Mixed Race Studies, is encapsulated in two episodes of the *Star Trek* series *Voyager* (1995-2001). In "Faces", the fourteenth episode of the first season, chief engineer B'Elanna Torres has her Klingon and human DNA separated to create two copies of herself. Her mixed identity is visually realised as a battle between two versions of the self. The implication is that Torres' body and identity is produced through a constant internal war that can be distilled into multiple selves. This duality, as Denise Alessandria Hurd argues, reproduces the trope of the 'tragic mulatto' (in Brode 41-52). The very presumption that the mixed self is not a whole being but rather a subcellular tension reduces mixed identity to a schizophrenic, biological disorder. This representation reproduces a racial logic and hierarchy that distils race, in the form of species, into distinct, essential categories.

This reductive rendering is then problematised in the twenty-fourth episode of the second season of *Voyager*, "Tuvix". In this episode, an alien plant and a transporter accident merge two characters, Tuvok and Neelix, into one new individual, Tuvix. While Tuvix has the memories and characteristics of both Tuvok and Neelix, the drama is created through Tuvix's insistence that he is a new, individuated life form. When Torres' mixedness is directly considered on *Voyager* it is rendered as a conflict, yet Tuvix, who one would expect to have genuine difficulties of multiple pre-existing identities converging, is defined by the lack of this very tension. In direct opposition to "Faces", Tuvix suggests splitting his identity, "would be like trying to extract the flour, eggs and water, after you'd baked the cake." *Voyager* does not actively address this contrast between mixed protagonists. Instead, both characters exist, if only for an episode, in the same paradoxical space. In the end, Tuvix is sacrificed so that Tuvok and Neelix may return. Although this splitting repeats the notion of mixed identity as separable into distinct parts, it is only made possible through the forced execution of Tuvix. Captain Janeway insists on conducting the operation herself as she is aware that bringing back Tuvok and Neelix requires her to "murder" Tuvix.

These examples delineate the core discord at the heart of *Star Trek's* representations of mixedness as two overarching, contradictory narratives repeatedly emerge in the show's long history. On the one hand, when mixed identity is directly addressed it is most often rendered through reductive tropes, such as 'Torres' internal war. On the other hand, and at the same time, mixed characters can be settled, complex individuals, like Tuvix. I suggest this representational instability is a realisation of Hall's 'maelstrom', in which contradictory understandings of mixedness are maintained concurrently. *Star Trek*, like Mixed Race Studies, struggles to come to terms with a desire to engage with racial discourses while simultaneously moving beyond racial logic.

Torres' internal war, for instance, derives from the two key tropes that theorists such as Ifekunwigwe, among others, point to as dominating representations of multiraciality. Ifekunwigwe describes these stereotyped renderings as the first two of three 'ages' in Mixed Race Studies: Age of Pathology, Age of Celebration, Age of Critique (8). *Star Trek* has not yet arrived at the Age of Critique, although a new series is imminent. The television show is also not as neatly linear in favouring different representations as the term 'ages' implies. The reason for this, as Mahtani distils (44), is that both pathologising and celebrating are reductive in a similar manner. These renderings, like 'hybridity', construct and essentialise mixed identities as liminal 'others'. Mixed individuals are articulated through an internalised border tension, which is either in conflict or lauded as a resolution of conflict. When *Star Trek* actively and directly considers mixed identity through interspecies characters, it almost always engages in pathologising or celebration.

The characterisation of Spock traces the inconsistent developments in *Star Trek's* representations of mixed identity. *The Original Series* (1966-1969) episodes only engage in pathologising mixedness. This inscription on mixed bodies begins with Spock in the fifth episode, appropriately titled "The Enemy Within", when he discloses: "Being split in two halves is no theory with me, Doctor. I have a human half, you see, as well as an alien half, submerged, constantly at war with each other." Across all the series and films, this conception of the mixed self as an internal war is repeated time and time again. Mixed species characters such as Spock, Torres, Deanna Troi, Tora Ziyal, K'Ehleyr, and so on, are repeatedly, but never consistently, described as uneven parts rather than whole people (see Hurd in Brode 41-52). This notion of inherent internal confrontation, a reiteration of the 'tragic mulatto' trope, recreates the borders of (implicitly racial) social constructs that marginalise and pathologise mixed individuals.

Although this pathologising mode of representation is maintained with relative consistency throughout the history of *Star Trek*, as seen in "Faces", from the 1980s on there is also a turn to celebrating mixedness. In the films that follow *The Original Series*, Spock steadily becomes a messianic figure; in Hurd's terms, he "took on Christ-like proportions" (Brode 45). Indeed, in *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), Spock is literally resurrected having sacrificed himself to save the crew in the previous film. He then goes on to become an ambassadorial peacemaker in *The Next Generation* (1987-1994)

episode “Unification”. The narrative arc of Spock’s life across *Star Trek* begins with internal war before ending with external peace. It is implied that mixed identity by resolving itself can become a universal saviour heralding a utopic future of reconciled conflicts. The final movement of the original Spock is his crossing over from the primary universe to an alternate reality in the J. J. Abrams’ films (the ‘JJ-verse’). Due to this traversal, he exists as two people, a younger and older version, in the JJ-verse. He then physically meets and guides his younger self, which visibly renders the mixed individual as a dualistic, mystical form of future-proofing.

The celebration of mixedness becomes a more prominent trope not only in the characterisation of Spock but also in the most recent television shows *Voyager* and *Enterprise* (2001-2005). Although this development echoes the ages of Mixed Race Studies, the recurrence of pathologising representations at the same time as celebrating mixedness in *Star Trek* blurs the sense of progression. Furthermore, this change is largely superficial as it relies on a consistent, essentialised, racial logic. Celebrating mixedness as a romantic precursor to a ‘post-racial’ society, still renders mixed identity as exceptional and ‘other’.

In *Star Trek*, celebratory representations of mixedness usually occur in the form of pregnancies, babies, and children. The one quarter Klingon and three quarters human child of B’Elanna Torres and Tom Paris in *Voyager* is a characteristic example. This baby is eventually born in the closing moments of the final episode of *Voyager*, “Endgame”, as the ship returns from its seven-year run being stranded in the Delta Quadrant. This return is enabled by an older version of Captain Janeway arriving from the future to guide *Voyager*. The homecoming is then conflated with the birth, as both the ship and baby emerge at the same time into the Alpha Quadrant. In its coinciding with a now alternative future, due to Janeway’s temporal intervention, the mixed child is codified as a symbol for new possibilities. Furthermore, this birth at an auspicious moment recalls the previous episode “Prophecy”, in which the unborn baby is considered by a group of Klingons to be messianic (see Barrett 192).

*Enterprise* engages in the most explicit representation and consideration of interspecies children as precursors to a progressive future in the two-part episode “Demons” and “Terra Prime”. A xenophobic madman, Paxton, uses DNA from primary characters on *Enterprise*, the Vulcan T’Pol and human Trip Tucker, to create a baby. His intention is to use the child, who is ill, and a laser array to discourage the presence of aliens on Earth. His plan is foiled and the child dies of its illness. Setting the potentiality of Vulcan/human children in direct opposition to the villain Paxton, though, renders mixed identity as inherently ushering in a positive future. The fact the baby is born outside of the womb prioritises a biological understanding of mixing. Paxton’s attitudes and language, such as describing the child as “a cross-breed freak”, however, derive from racist practice. While ostensibly not about race, as it is about intergalactic species, this representation of mixing still refers to racial logic through racist language. Symbolic value is placed on the child as innately resolving racial confrontation by situating the mixed individual in a Bhabha-esque liminal space. This construction reinforces essentialised racial categories in order to delineate this liminality. The child is thus celebrated as inherently opposing the villainous

Paxton's racist polemics, that essentialised groups cannot integrate, but only through a racialised framework.

These representations, pathologising and celebrating, are prefigured by an essentialised understanding of identity, a racial logic, that renders the mixed individual as a living border tension. The increased emphasis on celebrating rather than pathologising only reiterates this racialised thinking. Fundamentally the celebration, implicitly moving to a 'post-racial' society, is rendered impossible as the celebration itself is only made possible through an ongoing racial tension. In other words, the internal contradiction of Mixed Race Studies, the inability to move beyond racial logic, is embodied in *Star Trek's* mixed messiahs who require an internal, essentialised interspecies conflict in order to, temporarily, resolve such conflict. I suggest, however, that in *Star Trek's* indirect negotiations of mixed identity the show's utopian impulses become more fruitful as a means of stepping beyond racialised thinking.

### ***The Ordinarity of Mixed Identity***

Against, around, and undermining the narratives of internal wars and messianic potentials, *Star Trek* also sustains representations of mixedness as contradictorily unremarkable. Just as the tense action scenes are juxtaposed with light humour, poker games, chess, meals and so forth, there is a significant amount of, what could be called, downtime mixed identity representation. Maintaining the loaded pathologising and celebrating myths inscribed on interspecies characters is dramatically exhausting and only momentarily realised when mixedness is directly addressed. For the hundreds of other hours of screen time, mixed identity is contrastingly unexceptional. The everyday practices of the mixed population of *Star Trek* is not determined by the fact they are mixed. They are not located in consistent liminal zones, but move between social spaces in the same manner as non-mixed species characters. In essence, the experiences, practices, and behaviours of mixed individuals are as unique as everybody else's, which problematises the racial logic of essential identities being stable and distinguishable.

Torres, Spock, and Deanna Troi, for instance, are primary protagonists on their respective ships and series. While they all display confessional moments of rehearsing the tropes of internal conflict, they also live with an everyday normalcy through their series in the same manner as every other non-mixed species character. Torres may show instances of anger and a short temper, which are associated with her Klingon heritage, but these are rarely exceptional. Indeed, compared to *Star Trek's* villains, who are almost all biologically 'pure', such as Dukat, Nero, or Paxton, Torres is even keeled. Spock also seems more balanced, or well-adjusted, than a number of other 'full' Vulcan characters. Compared to, for instance, T'Pol, Vorik, Solok, and even his father Sarek, Spock seems calm and restrained. However, this temperateness is not unique and is reiterated in *Voyager's* Tuvok (another 'full' Vulcan).

The subcellular tension found in the pathologising representations of mixed identity may be registered in confessions, but it is seldom enacted in practice. The celebrating myth is undermined, likewise, by its lack of active realisation. Rarely is peace brought about through the presence of a mixed species character. The mixed children who herald new possibilities are not seen reaching adulthood. Even Spock's messianic development results in relatively little, as his peace-making is usually rendered as an event that will happen in the future. The need to have varied storylines, and the implicit recognition that mixed identity does not render someone exceptional, causes a representational instability. When brought to the fore, *Star Trek* negotiates mixedness in a manner that repeats and reinforces racial logic. However, at the same time, when mixed identity is not the focal point, mixedness appears to have little to no determining role. There is a core contradiction in this approach, I suggest produced through a utopian impulse to imagine social unity, found in the inconsistent invoking of essentialised racial logic.

Deanna Troi in *The Next Generation* brings this representational instability to the fore. As Ina Rae Hark argues, *The Next Generation* is the *Star Trek* series most determined by "utopian hopes" (65). This is seen in the comparatively few conflicts between crew members, and "[the show's] valuation of the collective being (*pace* Borg) of its crew as equal to, if not preferable to, the atomised and often messy individual relationships" (Hark 85). Troi, a mixed human Betazoid, settles seamlessly into this collective being. She is one of the most emotionally stable protagonists in the *Star Trek* universe. Compared to the childhoods of the rest of *The Next Generation* crew, for instance, Troi's life is uneventful (see Barrett 213). Her role as the ship's counsellor also invites a psychologically balanced representation. Again, as with mixed identity in general, the narratives that focus on Troi are driven by psychological breakdowns and dramatic tension, usually when her empathic ability is exploited. But for the majority of her screen time, Troi is an anchor of calm by the side of Captain Picard. Her practice of living always eventually fits in with the rest of the crew's collective being, as their differences and diversity are only ever rendered as productive means to negotiating common goals. Due to this utopian drive towards togetherness, Troi's internal war or messianic potential as a mixed species individual can never be so pronounced as to disrupt the collective order.

The tendency towards being just like everybody else, facing similar problems and showing the same resolve, and living an everyday reality in which mixed identity plays no determining role, subverts and destabilises the representations of mixed characters as being 'other'. This representational instability then echoes the internal contradiction of Mixed Race Studies as a discord between trying to think beyond race while still recognising the social reality of race. The concept of mixedness, when directly addressed in *Star Trek*, is based on essentialised racial logic. The practice of mixing, however, is continuously contingent.

I suggest the unstable understanding of mixing as both exceptional and unremarkable can also, to some degree, account for the unsettled debate that has dominated the mini-discipline of *Star Trek* Studies over the show's representations of race. Critics such as Daniel Bernadi, Allen Kwan, and David Golumbia argue that *Star Trek* reimagines, and thus reinforces, white hegemony. Theorists of this position tend to focus on *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation*, as opposed to the later shows *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) and *Voyager*. The last series (so far), *Enterprise*, is often caught in the middle of this race debate. Primarily, I suggest, this focus on the earlier incarnations of *Star Trek* as exemplifying white hegemony is due to the fact that *Deep Space Nine* has a black captain (Avery Brooks as Benjamin Sisko) and *Voyager* a female one (Kate Mulgrew as Katherine Janeway). However, the most vociferous of these critics emphasise that all versions of the United Federation of Planets function as a re-establishing of an American exceptionalist hegemony that is based in white culture. In response to the reading of white hegemony several, in Michèle and Duncan Barrett's terms, "spiky academic debates" (11) have emerged.

Scholars that challenge the white hegemony interpretation, such as the Barretts or Margaret Rose (1201), often turn to Jon Wagner and Jan Lundeen's reading of *The Next Generation* episode "Redemption II":

[Wagner and Lundeen] describe the following situation: it is discovered that the destruction of Worf's entire family honour was brought about by another family; according to Klingon custom Worf has the right to take a life of a young representative; Worf is handed a knife and the boy is set in front of him. The choice is either to kill the boy and act out a (racist) stereotype of innate Klingon aggression, or not kill him and demonstrate that Worf has sold out his Klingon heritage and been duped into absorbing Starfleet values. As Wagner and Lundeen point out, *Star Trek* 'can't win: if Worf drops the knife, the plot validates assimilation; if he uses it, the story racially essentialises Worf. Either way, *Trek* is racist.' (Barrett 118)

The fundamental problem implied by Wagner and Lundeen is that the terms on which *Star Trek* is to be engaged and interpreted are unclear. The inconsistency in representing mixedness, for instance, indicates a 'contingent, unguaranteed, political argument' in which the parameters of negotiating identity are in a maelstrom of multiplicity. Roddenberry's guide for the writers of *The Original Series* sets this unresolved problematic as a basis for *Star Trek*. He suggested the show should be "completely multiracial. But even in this future century we will see some traditional trappings, ornaments, and styles that suggest the Asiatic, the Arabic, the Latin, etc." (qtd in Bernadi 37). To engender and display the 'complete' multiraciality envisaged by Roddenberry, an impossible and ill-defined ideal, the show is prefigured by stereotyped trappings. Just as Spock must resolve an internal conflict in order to start overcoming interspecies tension, and Mixed Race Studies reinscribes the prominence of race in its terminology, *Star Trek*'s active negotiations of race operate through an established racial logic.



As already suggested, however, *Star Trek's* representations of mixed identity are inconsistent. The show's engagement with racial politics and discourses is fluctuating and unstable, as the examples of "Faces" and "Tuvix" indicate. This lack of uniformity problematises the rendering of humans as an allegory for whiteness. The sheer size of *Star Trek*, with its multiplicity of series, films, characters, and production processes, entails a variability that inevitably undermines such settled parallels. Indeed, the show's long history and efforts to engage with changing audiences and social climates, stemming from Roddenberry's contradiction of 'complete' multiracialism presented through discrete racial stereotypes, destabilises the possibilities of a coherent allegorical or symbolic order. I argue that *Star Trek* needs to be met on more practical terms as a cultural product of our time, and of our past, that engages unevenly and erratically with racial logic. The show is at once conservative, reductive, complex, and progressive. In essence, *Star Trek* sustains contradictory representations and narratives within a single paradoxical body by locating itself simultaneously in several social spaces.

As such, I suggest *Star Trek* is itself a performance of mixing. In the same manner as Spickard's negotiation of Bhabha's and Young's readings of 'hybridity', and the need to recognise how both are in part convincing but one 'cannot agree fully with either', I propose *Star Trek* simultaneously reinforces and challenges the racial logic underpinning white hegemony. The utopian impulse, though, to resolve this 'epistemic binary' by embracing continuous contingency enables a move forward. While the show reproduces racial logic in its direct considerations of mixed species identity, there is still an anti-essentialist core in the renderings of mixed characters as unexceptional. Recognising such race-based logic as a practice in the active negotiation of identity, but not as an essential basis of identity, indicates an alternative means of framing social relations. For instance, the Federation of Planets, Starfleet, is a community formed not on shared identities, but shared practice. I propose that the representational instability of *Star Trek*, the paradoxical space it envisages where mixed identity can be pathologised, celebrated, and unremarkable concurrently, is enabled by a mutability that presents alternative possibilities of sharing. With the term 'sharing' I am referring to similar senses or conceptions of reality, i.e. a synchronisation of understanding between two or more people.

### ***Cyborgs: A Lonely Togetherness***

I suggest this alternative means of social organisation is realised in the practice of mixing and, more particularly, in *Star Trek's* representations of mixing beyond mixed species. There are numerous examples that could fit this category, Worf's trans-species adoption, Dr. Bashir's genetic modifications, even Data as a human emulating android, but for the purposes of brevity I focus on cyborg identity. Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1984) can be taken as a starting point for outlining the parallels between mixed identity and cyborg identity. Specifically, Haraway's descriptions of cyborg identity uses the same language and follows a similar logic to many studies of multiraciality: "my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities" (295). Again, as with mixed

race theory and Hall's end of the essential, a central question for Haraway is how to stabilise incoherent experiences and unguaranteed arguments into a productive politics. She turns to irony: "Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true." (291) I suggest the mixing of Mixed Race Studies can be interpreted as such an ironic practice. Being 'located in several social spaces at the same time' holds the incompatible notions of stable selves and unstable social movement together in a single body. This is not resolving into a larger whole, but an already existing wholeness, the individual, being realised as contingent, a sustained multiplicity, or, not determined by an essential basis. Such an ironic practice of living also implies the possibilities of sharing in unexpected directions.

While not entirely equitable, the discourses of mixed race and cyborg identities share the same foundational, unstable problematics: How mixed/tech-ed does one have to be? How can a limitlessly variable identity be articulated? Can we continue current discourses without attending to such indefinite identities? Such uncertainty troubles Cultural Studies by disturbing the terms, or categorisations, that often drive group based politics as well as drawing attention to those excluded from conventional delineations of essentialised identities. *Star Trek* does not provide a solution to this unsettling but it does offer various means of exploration. In particular, the characterisation of Seven of Nine negotiates cyborg identity as a mutable though not exceptional practice of living (Geordi La Forge is a less striking example that stresses the unremarkable nature of biotechnology).

Seven is raised as a member of the Borg, a hive mind collective of cyborgs with the single purpose of assimilating all other cultures. Having been rescued, her individuality is hard fought and hard won across the last three seasons of *Voyager*. Seven, like all the mixed characters explored in this article, occasionally describes an internal war within herself but does not realise this conflict in her practice of living. Seven's experiences, and those of other cyborgs, such as the children she briefly adopts from the Borg or Hugh in *The Next Generation*, are individuated. But what makes these cyborgs distinct is their disconnection from the hive mind that is the Borg. It is the fact that these cyborgs are alone and must actively communicate in order to share that produces self-awareness and an ability to determine who they are. This isolation enables different kinds of relationships compared to a collective consciousness and, as such, presents a constantly negotiated yet maintained state of being both an individual and part of a community.

Seven's deepest social connections are formed through shared values and experiences. For instance, her closest friendships are with Naomi Wildman and the Emergency Medical Hologram, who, like Seven, are unique and have only relatively recently become self-aware (there are no other children or maintained holograms on the starship). From initially wishing to escape *Voyager*, Seven eventually integrates into the ship's culture as she begins to share in the collective desire to return to Earth. While she is first kept on the starship implicitly because she was once 'fully' human, Seven's increasingly important role in the social organisation of *Voyager* is based on shared values, purposes, and

conceptions of reality. In the same manner as Neelix, a Talaxian, Seven becomes part of the crew not because of an essential identity, but due to a steadily developed communal understanding. This sharing stems from the fact she is an individuated being, capable of making choices in her practice of living that enables the forming and collapsing of relationships. Her mixed identity may visibly differentiate Seven from the rest of the crew, but it ultimately does not determine her or her place in Starfleet society.

I propose that this individual based social organisation is formed by a utopian impulse towards a universal practice of mixing; or, a reimagining of individuality as distinct mixed sets of values and understandings, the subsets of which can be shared and provide foundations for grouping. I further suggest that this mixing is already part of our own means of community formation, as Haraway observes, “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. In short, we are cyborgs.” (292) The universalising of mixing that I am outlining here is dynamically interrelated with the end of the essential subject, in that both necessitate the other. Underlying Haraway’s formulation, though, is the implication that this mixing is only possible through a mythic process of theorisation and fabrication. In other words, the contradiction of Mixed Race Studies returns, as the production of hybrid cyborgs is due to an already presumed and constructed boundary. I argue, however, that we can follow the lead of *Star Trek*’s utopian impulse and step away from Haraway’s “ironic political myth” (291). Rather than the borders of essential identities, I propose, extending Mahtani’s framework, that the practice of mixing takes place in a single paradoxical social space. Mixing is less about transgressed boundaries or potent fusions, and more a description of sharing understandings of social realities. Such comprehensions are continuously contingent as they are negotiated through the experiences of living.

A politics of mixing would therefore be based on a social organisation of shared values, experiences, and conceptions of how the world works, rather than identities. It would be constantly mutable and multidirectional. Connections would necessarily never be whole but always in a multiplicity of orientations. Fundamentally in such a politics, and why I suggest this approach can start moving beyond racial logic, is that what matters is practice as opposed to identity. Race in this formulation is a social reality because it is practiced. But this is a contingent reality requiring constant application. As such, racist practice can be recognised as real but challenged as relying on a conditional, non-essential basis. Cultural Studies would then be tasked with distilling and analysing the composition, effects, and effectiveness of certain practices of living. In other words, to register, interrogate, and, in so doing, present alternatives to particular senses of reality.

However, I stress that this politics is utopian in a positive and negative sense. As Gordin et. al. argue, utopias and dystopias “are imbued with their own fault lines” (13). A major fault line for a politics of mixing is its situating of social reality in no place, a paradoxical space in which every principle and every person is insecure and variable. As Mahtani warns, “speaking of mixing in and of itself cannot be

seen as positive or progressive.” (254) The inability of a politics of mixing to prescribe values, it is a descriptive tool in essence, sets it unrealisable progressive goals. Its goodness is fundamentally relative. Furthermore, this politics undermines its own utopian ambitions as it implies that a ‘post-racial’ future will never be realised. The very insecurity of mixing dictates a constant change in which racist, and similar oppressive practices will always be at least a latent potential.

Hall offers another cogent warning: “a large body of work in cultural studies and critical theory generally thinks that if you unmask an essentialism, it’s finished. [...] Well what more are you going to do? *Out there*, the essentialism is roaring away just as it ever was.” (“Interview” 769 emphasis in original) My proposal for an alternative understanding of social organisation is framed as a refashioning of academic terminology, but the consequences of this linguistic shift are intended to be felt ‘out there’. A politics of mixing suggests the inadequacy of any collective organisation to account for the multiplicity, mutability, and movability of its individual constituents. Reframing social groupings as only partially representative, human beings as connecting never wholly and always in process, stresses the value of distilling and specifying both oppressive practices and their political responses. Through this refinement and more direct engagement with conceptions of reality, the ability of individuals to mix, to locate in several social spaces, can be utilised as a means of assembling support from across what are often identified as discrete groups. Although such a formation is complex, unsettled, and fragmented, it enables a greater flexibility that can accommodate non-essentialised individuality. The crucial role of cultural productions within this framework is their ability to communicate experiences, values, and understandings of the world. In other words, cultural production is an act of sharing that can make something real; or, more precisely, that can shape a sense of reality which in turn informs practices of living. Subsequently, Cultural Studies is not only vital in examining and defining what realities are being produced and their potential ramifications, but also in generating alternative understandings and practices.

As such I propose that a politics of mixing is a pragmatic anti-essentialism stepping towards an unreachable utopia. It is a means of social organisation that registers, and implicitly challenges, racist practice but refuses to adhere to racial logic. This is a language for Cultural Studies to negotiate living without the essential subject. It is a language based not on boundaries and borders, but networks of forming and collapsing relationships, of being located and dislocated in several overlapping centres and margins at once, of being alone and together. This is a utopian politics, inherently impossible to actualise securely and totally, but, like the final frontier, its exploration offers alternative possibilities.

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**Angus Young** is a final year PhD Research Scholar at The University of Leeds. His research interests include: Mixed Race Studies, hegemony, Cultural Studies, suicide, American Studies, and the work of Raymond Williams.

Email ID: enay@leeds.ac.uk

## The Business of Art [and Food]: Framing an Urban Identity Politic

Jaclyn Meloche

“... public art needs to be seen as a function not of art, but of urbanism. It needs to be thought of in relation to, rather than insulated from the numerous other functions, activities and imperatives that condition the fabric of the city.” (Deutsche 162)

In the discourse of human geography, and subsequently strands of gender studies, it is the relationship between the human body and the conditions of its environment that informs one's identity. Although a postmodern methodology through which to understand the body—in comparison to more traditional readings and practices of geography—human geography both highlights the precarity of space as well as the vulnerability of an identity politic. In Canadian artists Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *The Grocery Store: Live in the Exchange* (2002), it is the entanglement of geography and the notion of a locational identity that informs, as well as challenges the urban body in downtown Winnipeg. While commenting on the geographical and social conditions of gentrification, the site-specific intervention and performance troubles the notion of an urban identity by exploiting its limitations on urbanite lifestyles (Derek, Johnston, and Smith 2005).



Inspired by the concept that space embodies an agential function, specifically in the context of contemporary art, this article will complicate the sociology of human geography by proposing a posthuman framework through which to reconsider space as inherently performative. In Dempsey and Millan's site-specific installation *The Grocery Store*, the space of the city and the urban landscape provide what I refer to as a quintessential materialization of posthuman aesthetics in both geography and performance art. By interrupting the gentrified Winnipeg downtown core, the artist collective created both a political statement as well as a shift in spatial agency by problematizing the relationship between power, space and the public. But did this act of intervention change the space of the city? Moreover, how did its insertion influence the urban identity living in downtown Winnipeg? Lastly, from an entrepreneurial perspective, what is the function of this art gallery-turned-grocery store?

In theory and practice, *The Grocery Store* successfully shifts the dynamics within the downtown community by transforming the temporary store/installation into a performative platform for the embodiment of a political voice. In other words, this work creates a space in which the body no longer performs an innate sense of consciousness, but rather becomes performed by space itself.

One of the many challenges presented in this text, aside from disrupting the urban identity, is the task of naming and understanding space. How it is constructed? How it embodies agency? And how it does onto the body? Drawing from the writings of Edward Soja, Judith Butler and Doreen Massey, I will map an understanding of space as a site of aesthetic, political, social and bodily resistance. In the realm of contemporary art history, Rosalyn Deutsche's writings blur the architectural, political and spatial boundaries that have historically limited the understanding of public art as well as introduce a framework for considering the genealogy and performativity of space in visual and material culture. But through which lens can one begin to deconstruct the urban body with relation to *The Grocery Store: Live in the Exchange*? Moreover, how does an identity become the result of an urban landscape that is inherently performative?

With reference to the writings of John Austin, J. Hillis Miller and James Loxley, the term performativity is understood as a procedural method of doing. Austin, for example, deconstructs performativity through linguistics and semiotics arguing that performativity is representative of an act of doing with words; "[i]n these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (Austin 6). To complement Austin, J. Hillis Miller supports the argument that to perform means to reenact and repeat specific practices of doing; "[p]erformativity, it now appears, means, among other things, the assumption that human beings have no innate selfhood or subjectivity but become what they are through more or less forced repetition of a certain role" (Miller 225). In other words, that performativity represents an exchange between utterances, the act of doing, and the repetition of the doing. The concept that performativity is in itself a kind of process parallels my own theories on performance [art] in both research and practice.



Historically, performance art has been associated with the enactment of the body in real-time and real-space. However, in keeping with Austin and Miller's argument that performativity is in essence a process, I too support the claim that all that "performs" can be attributed performative agency. In his own words, James Loxley explains that "[i]n these different accounts of everyday life as a kind of performance we can see a shared insistence that the kind of performance usually associated with theater *matters*. It has effects, it shapes societies, it is the very stuff of our ordinary lives" (Loxley 154). Does this mean that performativity is not only attributed to human matter, but also to nonhuman matter, such as space?

In *The Grocery Store*, Dempsey and Millan enact a satirical, poignant, and arguably performative statement on gentrification and the binaries that characterize the capitalist politics of the urban landscape. For a period of three weeks in August 2002, the co-op collective, in collaboration with Jake Moore and Zab, opened a grocery store in the Ace Art Gallery in the Exchange District in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba. In response to the drastic renovation of the community, the artists installed and performed a public intervention through the insertion of a general store selling food and other basic necessities in the area. During the operation of this so-called business endeavor, the store sold over \$5000 worth of fresh local produce, and other basic goods to a public in need. By blurring the material and political boundaries between art and activism, Dempsey and Millan's performance challenged the hierarchies that have economically and politically heroicized gentrification. In the spirit of a performative manifesto, the artists, as well as the public/customers/participants, collectively embody the role of protestors who are literally and metaphorically working to complicate the absence of a space within space.

But what is space? In comparison to mapping and cartography that investigates the aesthetic organization of this matter, the space that is of interest in this study is relational, dialogical, and by nature performative. According to postmodern geography, the function and visual representation of space has experienced a shift since the 1970s (Derek, Johnston, and Smith 205-207). In current discourse and practice in human geography, the subject of space is no longer characterized as a visual representation of a site; rather space is qualified and quantified as an agent, an embodied force of power through which meaning becomes tangible. According to Soja, space is first and foremost social, as well as inherently procedural,

[s]o unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life, a practical theoretical consciousness that sees the life world of being creatively located not only in the making of history but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes: social being actively emplaced in space and time in an explicitly historical and geographical contextualization. (Soja 11)

In other words, it is the concept that space and the social work in tandem with each other to create meaning that is at the root of what Soja refers to as postmodern geographies.

Quite literally, Soja describes the procedural nature of space through the terms *formation* and *reformation* arguing that it is aesthetically, socially and politically transformative; and that the act of reforming a space signifies the very foundation of gentrification and the process of reviving urban capital. In theory, the act of gentrification signifies a similar kind of economic reformation. By ‘re-facing’ a space’s architectural and economic past, this so-called form of urban renovation in essence *reforms* space into a site for the development, redevelopment and production of capital. According to geographer Neil Smith, gentrification has a specific history rooted in the development of real estate, but has since become a strategy used to perpetuate neo-liberal and urban-centric planning; “... the process of gentrification, which initially emerged as a sporadic, quaint, and local anomaly in the housing markets of some command-center cities, is now thoroughly generalized as an urban strategy that takes over from liberal urban policy” (Smith 427). Consequently, gentrification has become a popular method used to revive space.

In comparison to the *reformation* of the urban stage, the gentrification of urban landscapes, according to Smith, not only exposes the development of capital and economic revitalization, but this global phenomenon also provides new platforms for the practice of relational aesthetics vis-à-vis the dissemination of spatial power. Furthermore, the growth of urban revitalization symbolizes a global strategy that ultimately revives social production in order to secure the flow of capital; “... the impulse behind gentrification is now generalized; its incidence is global, and it is densely connected into circuits of global capital and cultural circulation. What connects these two arguments is the shift from an urban scale defined according to the conditions of social reproduction to one in which the investment of productive capital holds definitive precedence” (Smith 427). If gentrification, according to Smith’s theory, represents an economic tension between capital gain and the social production of space, then what is the purpose of inserting a grocery store into a gentrified space as a form of satire and political activism? Moreover, how does a grocery store complicate the relationship between economic gain and public protest when a profit has been made?

Drawing from Saskia Sassen’s claim that social relations and the economy of space are framed by the globalization of site, Smith argues that the process of gentrifying space results in a new kind of urban living; “[p]lace is central to the circulation of people and capital that constitute globalization, and a focus on urban places in a globalizing world brings with it a recognition of the rapidly declining significance of the national economy, while also insisting that globalization takes place through specific social and economic complexes rooted in specific places” (Smith 430). Inspired by the writings of David Harvey, Neil Smith’s reading of space is rooted in a Marxist understanding that time and space itself are fundamental contributors to the economic production and reproduction of globalization.

In theory, this is not the kind of space, nor the perpetuation of spatial politics that Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan are advertising in *The Grocery Store*. By exposing the effects of gentrification and problematizing its economic, political and even social ramifications, the artists created a stage for public protest. In this example, space becomes a site for dialogical exchange between the social body in space and the urban landscape. Framed within the discourse of human geography, this so-called performance exemplifies what Michel Foucault terms a heterotopia, a permeable site in which time and space collapse. In “Of Other Spaces”, Foucault deconstructs the politics of space by complicating the hierarchies that historically characterized Western readings and experiences of its very structure. In his analysis of this subject, he approaches space through a poststructural lens writing that “[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at the moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (Foucault 22). By suggesting that space is procedural and reciprocal, he is, in essence, proposing to shatter the ‘frames’ that have traditionally powered, and limited, the production of space.

Influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault, cultural and feminist theorist Judith Butler is critical of the binaries that have historically organized how meaning is understood and experienced inside and outside of these very boundaries. By appropriating the frame as a metaphor to both aestheticize and politicize the spatial and gendered binaries that have worked to determine who and what is deemed intelligible and therefore grievable, Butler argues that the frame does not in fact work to understand *truth*, but rather is symptomatic of the precarity of space and identity. In her recent text *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, she deconstructs the politics that continue to perpetuate the framing of an identity by proposing that a frame inherently adopts a performative role by becoming an agent that renegotiates fact and fiction; “[t]he frame does not simply exhibit reality, but actively participates in a strategy of containment, selectively producing and enforcing what will count as reality. It tries to do this, and its efforts are a powerful wager. Although framing cannot always contain what it seeks to make visible or readable, it remains structured by the aim of instrumentalizing certain versions of reality” (Butler xiii). Therefore the frame, according to Butler, is a procedural device that is appropriated to create and recreate the meaning of space vis-à-vis a body’s identity.

In the context of posthuman geography, the Butlerian frame represents a foundation for understanding space as inherently performative. Although considered an aesthetic device, the frame in this reading becomes a transformative apparatus used to organize, structure and activate social and spatial politics. In her own words, “[m]y point is that such visual and conceptual frames are ways of building and destroying populations as objects of knowledge and targets of war, and that such frames are the means through which social norms are relayed and made effective” (Butler xix). By intertwining this theory of performativity with Soja’s claim that space is a semiotic signifier through which meaning is performed, the argument can thus be made that Dempsey and Millan’s grocery store is in itself performing the

politics of space as well as reframing the nature of an urban identity. In other words, their grocery store, because of its temporal presence in downtown Winnipeg, becomes what Foucault would describe as a utopia, a “site with no real place” (Foucault 24). Representative of an ideal space that complicates real spaces, he explains that “[t]hey are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfect form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault 24). Therefore, because of the lack of this kind of space in the downtown district, Dempsey and Millan’s intervention becomes that of a fantasy, a three-week-long dream space that will only perpetuate its nostalgia when yet again removed.

Although Soja believes that space embodies formation, and more importantly reformation, it is equally necessary to understand the role that the history of space plays in its revitalized landscape; “[n]ew possibilities are being generated from this creative commingling, (possibilities for a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism; a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being; a transformative re-theorization of the relations between history, geography, and modernity” (Soja 12). In other words, his definition of space embodies the potentiality for agency rather than a reflection of a lack, or what he refers to as erasure; “[m]y intent is not to erase the historical hermeneutic but to open up and recompose the territory of the historical imagination through a critical spatialization” (Soja 12).

The concept that space is performative has thus far been deconstructed through a Foucauldian and Butlerian lens in which space is co-constitutive of economic, political and social relations. Influenced by the latter, British geographer Doreen Massey inserts another problematic into the investigation of space arguing that its production is also influenced by gender relations. In her own words, “[t]he intersections and mutual influences of geography and gender are deep and multifarious. Each is, in profound ways, implicated in the construction of the other: geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply influential in the production of the geographical” (Massey 177). Supportive of the theory that space is not static, but rather relational, Massey proposes a methodology through which to consider space as an active agent that informs, and is informed by the identity of the body; “[t]he view, then, is of space-time as a configuration of social relations within which the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity. Moreover, since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification” (Massey 3).

Inspired by structuralism and the discourse of human geography, Massey’s investigation of spatial relations vis-à-vis the construction of gender not only considers the social production of space, but through a feminist lens also seeks to complicate the dichotomous hierarchies that stereotype space as masculine and the lack of space as feminine; “[t]hus this pervasive and influential view of the relationship between space and time sees them as dichotomous and as dichotomous in a particular way.

It is a formulation in which time is the privileged signifier in a distinction of the type A/not-A. It is, moreover, time which is typically coded masculine and space, being absence or lack, as feminine. Moreover, the same gendering operates through the series of dualisms which are linked to time and space” (Massey 6). Although teetering on an essentialist representation of gender and gender relations, Massey’s codification of gender in relation to space is important to consider because human geography as a discipline states that space is socially interdependent. In other words, that the dialogical nature of space means that it is informed by its reciprocal relationship with the body—or in the case of *The Grocery Store*—the urban identity.

In *Space, Place, and Gender*, Massey understands the relationship between gender and space as inherently relational; “[g]eography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development” (Massey 2). Therefore, in order to qualify and quantify space, the body must be identified.

The identification and deconstruction of gender, in the example of Dempsey and Millan’s grocery store, is relevant not only because both artists are women; but because their act of intervention complicates what Massey identifies as the coded identities of gender and space. In the spirit of a political protest, the artists’ insertion of a grocery store in downtown Winnipeg fills both a social void, and an economic void making them heroines rather than enemies of the state—an identity that has typically plagued the female body in space according to Massey; “... to Freud’s famous pronouncement that woman is the enemy of civilization, to the many subsequent critics and analysts of such statements of the ‘obviousness’ of dualisms, of their inter-relation one with another, and of their connotations of male and female, such literature is now considerable. And space, in this system of interconnected dualisms, is coded female” (Massey 149).

Does this mean that spatial reclamation is a male act? Furthermore, what does it mean when two lesbians fill a spatial void? Since the late 1980s, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan have used their art as a political platform to critique and destabilize gender, sexual and queer stereotypes. By embodying the roles of lesbian park rangers, 1950’s inspired domestic divas and now grocery store workers, they appropriate performance art as a vehicle to reach out to and engage with a larger audience. Using dress up, rock music and food, the artists inspire a relational space in which all participants become agents. Therefore, the question of gender, in the context of Dempsey and Millan’s larger body of work, becomes important because both artists consciously work to complicate the representation of gender and sexual roles through political, yet funny and entertaining, acts of insertion.

To reiterate one of the questions that has inspired this text—*how is space performative?*—Massey’s contribution to human geography becomes important when trying to expand the discourse into the realm of posthuman geography. In keeping with Soja and Foucault’s argument that space is a dialogical extension of its relationship with the body, Massey too argues that space is social and relational writing

that “... we need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global. Earlier it was reported how in human geography, the recognition that the spatial is socially constituted was followed by the perhaps even more powerful (in the sense of the breadth of its implications) recognition that the social is necessarily spatially constituted too” (Massey 155). The concept that the social is spatial is arguably indicative of what I will refer to as a premature theory of posthuman geography. Therefore, the notion that matter, or rather space, can embody agency and exist in an active state exemplifies a shift in the ways in which space has typically been theorized in the field of geography, at least since the 1970’s.

In recent scholarship, particularly in the fields of visual and media arts and performance studies, space has since become performative through a transformative shift in practice and aesthetics. Subsequently, space is no longer merely socially relational, but rather inter-relational and intra-relational. In contemporary art history, Rosalyn Deutsche’s readings of spatial politics have become important in the exemplification that space is fundamentally performative. In her seminal text *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, she proposes a methodology to complicate the ‘traditional’ readings of public space in relation to public art and tries to expand the definitions that have historically limited the reception of art in public spaces all the while trying to dismantle the so-called structural frames that have informed the works’ engagement with the construction and geography of a community. Moreover, she insists that public art must engage in a democratic debate, meaning that it must provide a platform for questions surrounding space, its public and its function; “public art springs from a belief that it is important to proliferate public spaces, to join struggles to make many different kinds of spaces public, to displace the boundary between the public and the private, and, in so doing, to enlarge, rather than limit, the space of politics.” (In a paper presented at the 1998 conference at The Photography Institute, Deutsche stated, “The Question of Public Space”.)

In the chapter “Tilted Arc and the Uses of Democracy,” Deutsche deconstructs Richard Serra’s sculpture *Tilted Arc* to exemplify the agency of space in the urban landscape. By developing a case study surrounding the political erection and removal of Serra’s monumental public piece, she seeks to understand how it works to represent and challenge the use of space. In 1979, the United States General Services Administration (GSA) announced the commission of a public art installation, and in 1981 they approved the installation of the larger-than-life arc/wall on the grounds of New York City’s Federal Plaza. A site-specific intervention, the work performed an urban reorganization of space by changing how the public used the space, as well as how they interacted with it. According to Deutsche, the term ‘use’ remains a contentious term problematizing both the function of space, and the function of objects installed in public spaces; “[u]se referred to the act of putting space into the service of fundamental pleasures and needs. Objects and practices in space were held to be of public use if they are uniformly beneficial, expressing common values or fulfilling universal needs” (Deutsche 259). Consequently, she is critical of the concept of universality arguing that a shared experience of space

both limits its inherent dialogical nature as well as threatens its very existence; “... when participants in a debate about the uses of public space remove the definitions of public and use to a realm of objectivity located not only outside the *Tilted Arc* debate but outside debate altogether, they threaten to erase public space altogether” (Deutsche 259). In other words, she is trying to understand how space avoids becoming a victim of politics?

Writing in the context of public art, site-specific art and art as intervention, Deutsche maintains “that art is defined by an independent aesthetic essence, prevailing doctrines hold that, while art inevitably ‘reflects’ social reality, its purpose is, by definition, the transcendence of spatiotemporal contingencies in the universal, timeless work of art” (Deutsche 159). Moreover, that the relationship between art and space exemplify the embodiment of a performative function that translates public art into a site for exchange. The importance of site specificity, in her interpretation, represents a direct dialogue between space, architecture, the public, and their use of the given site; “[s]ite specificity, a technique in which context was incorporated into the work itself, originally developed to counteract the construction of ideological art objects, purportedly defined by independent essences, and to reveal the ways in which art is constituted by its institutional frame” (Deutsche 159). Furthermore, that “[t]he reciprocity between artwork and site altered the identity of each, blurring the boundaries between them and preparing the ground for a greater participation of art in wider cultural and social practice” (Deutsche 160). Incidentally the term site specificity translates into a strategical method developed to challenge the institutional relationships between space, the object and the public.

In *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, art historian Miwon Kwon suggests that site specificity is not only a dialogical device that complicates the ideological function of the art object in space, but that it becomes a methodology for the problematization of space; “site specificity [is] not exclusively an artistic genre but a problem-idea, as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics” (Kwon 2). Subsequently, site specificity is appropriated as a strategic tool used to question the active role of space in art. In this context, then how does site specificity inform the use of spatial politics in *The Grocery Store*? Situated in the Exchange district, Dempsey and Millan’s intervention becomes a direct commentary on the aesthetics and function of gentrification. According to Deutsche, gentrification is in itself an act of domestication. Critical of Kay Larson’s claim that “... gentrification is a positive metaphor for changes in art practice,” (Deutsche 167) she draws from Neil Smith’s concept that frames gentrification as an economic strategy that politicizes space; “that [g]entrification only appears to result from the heroic conquest of hostile environments by individual pioneers” (Deutsche 167). Does this mean that it is heroic to remove the access to basic necessities, such as food, from the public? In theory, *The Grocery Store* represents more than an artistic intervention in a community; the temporary general store also serves to highlight an important contradiction of the function of gentrification. By removing a space that sells basic goods, the city, whose interest lies in developing new and improved living quarters as well as the potential for economic growth and development, forces its residents to travel outside of its district to shop, and therefore threatens the community’s potentiality for additional capital

gain. In what could translate into an economic and social resolution for the risks caused by gentrification, public art interventions like the latter reveal the fundamental complications of urban redevelopment—and subsequently the limitations inherent within an urban identity.

In her research and writings on urban politics, postmodern theories of art and architecture and public space, Kwon speaks to the idea that public art interventions “seek to reframe site specificity as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes that organize urban life and urban space” (Deutsche 3). To paraphrase, art interventions do more than shed light on urban and spatial politics, they also work to reactivate what has been taken away from a space, even if only for three weeks.

Earlier in this text, I ask if the insertion of a grocery store in a gentrified space translates into a form of political activism? Furthermore, how does a grocery store complicate the relationship between economic gain and public protest when a profit has been made? In the context of Kwon’s understanding of spatial interventions, the inherent role of art of this nature is in fact to both highlight and challenge the relationship between the social and the economic identity of space. Therefore, because the grocery store transformed into a kind of business endeavor and profit earning establishment, its \$5000 in sold goods works to emphasize the very political nature of the erasure, insertion and removal of the space.

In this text, I preface the thesis for this investigation by asking a series of questions surrounding the performativity of space: what is space? How is space constructed? What is its relationship with the urban body? And how can it, if at all, embody agency? With reference to Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan’s 2002 performative art installation *The Grocery Store: Live in the Exchange*, I deconstruct the spatial politics that have made this particular piece necessary, and successful as both an art object, and a political statement. Historically, the discourse of geography has been associated with cartography, mapping and the formal organization of space. Since the 1970’s, human geography has proposed a shift in the reading and practice of geography by expanding the discourse into a relational and social investigation of the body in time and space.

According to thinkers such as Edward Soja, Michel Foucault and Doreen Massey, the study of space is fundamentally rooted in the concept that it is inherently dialogical. Moreover, that space, through an exchange with the human body, becomes inter-active and intra-active. With regards to the spatial shifts experienced in and through *The Grocery Store*, and their influence on the urban body, this text offers a lens through which to consider the limitations of gentrification and its effects on the urban identity. But when expanded into the realm of contemporary art criticism, space becomes more than a device deployed to map a site, contain an object or surround the body. Instead, space becomes an agent who does onto the body, and subsequently can also be done onto by the body. In *The Grocery Store*, space and the body exist in dialogue revealing both the limitations of gentrification on a community as well as the effects of human behavior on urban renewal. Therefore, through the politics of human geography, the



intervention reveals how bodies protest the loss of service in an urban community while exposing the ways in which gentrification troubles an identity.

## Notes

Photo credit: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan with Zab of Zab Design and Jake Moore, *The Grocery Store: Live in the Exchange*, 2002.

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**Jaclyn Meloche** completed an interdisciplinary PhD in Humanities at Concordia University, Montreal in 2015 and is currently Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Windsor. She is the editor of the forthcoming publication *What is our Role: Artists in Academia and the Post-Knowledge Economy* (YYZ BOOKS, 2018) and author of “Camera Performed: Visualizing the Behaviours of Technology in Digital Performance,” (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), “The Politics of Perception: Re/Constructing Meaning Inside the Frame of War,” (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and “Houses, Homes and the Horrors of a Suburban Identity Politic,” (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). She exhibits her art regularly and has earned reviews for her art and research in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Canadian Art* as well as the publication *Mediacity: Situations, Practices, and Encounters*.

Email ID: jacmeloche@bell.net

## Self and Sexuality in Aubrey Menen

Rajorshi Das, Assistant Professor (ad-hoc), Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi

### Introduction: Self and Autobiography

In *Forbidden Sex, Forbidden Texts* (2009) Hoshang Merchant writes—“if you can bend gender, you can bend genre. Gays are gender-benders and genre benders” (28). According to him, dissident sexuality may denote a third gender<sup>1</sup> that would produce a “third (new) genre” (28). Although he does not use the term ‘Queer’ which is often read as an alternate to gender, Merchant underlines the subversive agenda of this new genre that is a threat to dominant literary forms. Neither of Aubrey Menen’s two texts—*Dead Man in a Silver Market* (1953) and *The Space Within the Heart* (1970) follow the conventions expected from traditional autobiographies. While the former text is a collage of memories stitched together as a commentary on national prides and cultures, the latter is a deeper investment in the formation of the self that is fluid and in a constant state of flux. Like his sexuality that resists labels, Menen’s *The Space Within the Heart* refuses to be cocooned into compartments of genres while conforming to the expectations of intimacy and self-scrutiny—that are integral to life-writing.

Though the autobiographical model can be traced back to Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, as a genre it can be said to have gained prominence in the early nineteenth century with emphasis on a unified cohesive self and strict guidelines. In his essay, ‘The Law of Genre’ Derrida writes that “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity” (203, 204). If genres are to be recognized as a law or a legitimizing agency, then choosing an autobiography validates the life experiences of the author and by extension a queer author’s sexuality. However, as Linda Anderson argues – “autobiography... turns itself into a genre in order to ‘place’ the subject, the ‘I’, only to be undone by the instability and difference already instated within the law” (12). This instability is captured in the form of a fragmented self in postmodern and postcolonial era which when read through psychoanalysis would replicate a post-mirror stage. In Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage the infant derives his/her psychic understanding of the self through his/her reflection in the mirror as a unified whole. The ego therefore is a product of external forces relational to the Other. Menen’s autobiographical quest is an attempt to reconstitute his self through a Foucauldian process of “subjectivation” and resist “interpellation” (as theorized by Althusser) by social or political institutions. Central to Foucault’s exposition of subjectivity is the concept of “ethics”. In *Technologies of the Self* Foucault refers to the ancient Greek practices as being centered around the philosophy of the “care of the self” which is a pre-condition to operationalize the Delphic principle, *gnothi sauton* (“know yourself”). Though Foucault privileges the former over the latter, Menen’s texts are largely concerned with the idea of self-knowledge and ‘truth’ that are central to Indian metaphysics as a means to take care of the self. As a “story of Menen’s search through his

persona for his true self, peopled with characters he met during this search and during the formation of his character” (Hall vii), *The Space Within the Heart* is not a coming-of-age narrative or a chronological progression of personal history. Rather it is a journey into the self—“the ‘Tranquil Eye’ or the *atman*.” The purpose of this paper is to recognize this shift towards spirituality as a means to look for a space that allows self-definition and self-transcendence. Menen’s reading of the Upanishads has to be seen in terms of an investment in cultural studies whereby he retrieves ancient knowledge to make sense of the material conditions that produce his sexuality.

### Religion, Spirituality and Sexuality

In his Preface to *Gay Writers in Search of the Divine* (2006) Antony Copley writes—“given two such powerful drives as the sexual and the religious, often in conflict, it is deeply intriguing to see just how any one individual ‘manages their rivalry and seeks their reconciliation’” (1). Religion and sexuality (particularly homosexuality) are usually seen as ideologically opposed to each other. Many religious and orthodox organizations in India have continued to oppose the decriminalization of Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code citing the “Western origin” of homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai have vigorously contested these claims by retrieving instances of homoeroticism within cultural and religious structures in ancient and medieval India. Religion therefore has become an important location of power and privilege that sexual minorities are reluctant to disavow. Much like Stephen’s plea for acceptance in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the discourse on LGBTQ rights in India has centered on the need to locate one’s sexuality within one’s religion and nation-state thereby resulting in different forms of exclusionary politics. Nivedita Menon cites how Ashok Row Kavi, arguably India’s first gay activist took a Hindu nationalist stance in 2001 during a raid on an NGO working on HIV/AIDS awareness. The latter who believed that India is “tolerant only because of Hindu majority” had argued that the NGO was run by Muslims and “have a chunk of Pakistani nationals residing there” (32). Kavi’s views are not very different from the philosophy of Hindutva that sees Muslims and Christians as outsiders and strangers to the nation-state due to their late point of entry into the subcontinent. Incidentally if *hijra* activist Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s repeated emphasis on her upper caste mooring is anything to go by, transgender politics in India is also taking a homonationalist turn with a focus on mainstreaming and a pristine Hindu past in lieu of difference and queer intersectionality.<sup>3</sup> This heralds a de-politicization of working class transgender and (by extension) queer milieu in favour of domesticity and a conformist nation-building. While the ‘Hindu Queer’ (somewhat like the ‘Hindu feminist’) may sound like an oxymoron, given the religion’s fundamental basis of a discriminatory caste system, one cannot completely disengage identities based on sexuality from those seeking refuge in religion. Doing so may also result in reading categories like ‘Muslim’ and ‘Queer’ as innately oppositional, thereby contributing to the post 9/11 surveillance of visibly Muslim bodies who are seen as a threat to “progressive” Western cultures.<sup>4</sup> In fact, such an anxiety is the product of the

same Islamophobia that is harboured by Hindu gay activists like Row Kavi. Cognizant of such dangers of majoritarianism, Aubrey Menen chooses to reject organized religion in favour of spirituality as shall be evident in my subsequent analysis.

In the *Death of God* (1961) Gabriel Vahanian argues that the post-Christian worldview in western cultures lacked any sense of the sacred or sacramental order. This worldview as a reaction to the World Wars and the fall of the British Empire emphasized the reduced importance of Christianity in Western civilisations that are no longer willing to submit to a “transcendent, monotheistically-conceived deity” but seeks to construct the self on their own terms (Browne 9). The relationship between homosexuality as an identity and spirituality in general can be traced back to Edward Carpenter, the late Victorian radical whose sexuality and opposition to British imperialism allowed him to seek out affective communities in non-Western cultures. Antony Copley writes that both Carpenter and Isherwood were drawn to the Vedantist approach as “it presupposed the possibility of absorption of the ego with the divine” (4). In *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), Carpenter postulates his idea of the homogenic attachment that he projects as a higher form of love; his Uranian is almost a future species adept not only in artistic endeavours but also affairs of the heart:

It is hard to imagine human beings more skilled in these matters than are the Intermediates. For indeed no one else can possibly respond to and understand, as they do, all the fluctuations and interactions of the masculine and feminine in human life. The pretensive coyness and passivity of women, the rude invasiveness of men; lust, brutality, secret tears, the bleeding heart; renunciation, motherhood, finesse, romance, angelic devotion—all these things lie slumbering in the Uranian soul, ready on occasion for expression; and if they are not always expressed are always there for purposes of divination or interpretation. (38)

Hinduism seemingly celebrates androgyny and sexual fluidity thereby providing Carpenter with a philosophy that may legitimize his sexuality.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Isherwood who would find it difficult to embrace asceticism and Forster who would take refuge in the Vaishnavite cult that feeds on gender fluidity, Carpenter who privileges platonic over sexual love finds solace in Vedanta that insists on sublimated sexuality. Incidentally while many Hindu deities celebrate sexuality and androgyny, the last two stages in a devout Hindu's life, are those of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyassa*. Asceticism and sexual abstinence therefore are integral to the Indian societal set-up as also espoused by Gandhi.

Unlike the trio (Carpenter, Forster and Isherwood) who seek out solidarities in alien cultures, Menen's interest in the Upanishad is a result of his Nayar father's rejection of organized religion in favour of the ancient texts which are peripheral to mainstream Hinduism. It is a path towards reconciliation; almost a solution to the various forms of violence, be it as a result of anti-Semitism or imperialism. Menen is also disillusioned with the Church which is complicit in the colonialist agenda harbouring stereotypes of racial purity and English exclusivity. Kath Browne amongst others mentions that “religion, understood sociologically, usually operating through the prism of theism or approved deities,

proscribes morality and a way of life, imposes cultural norms and traditions and even ethnic identity” (9). Though the author’s sarcasm in *The Dead Man in the Silver Market* downplays much of the discrimination that he faced in British public places, in *The Space Within the Heart* he is relentless in his rejection of this Eurocentric world-view. The latter text opens with his meeting with Pope XXIII who insists that Menen is not English, obtrusively pointing to his physical features. As Menen uncharacteristically conforms to the label of an “Indian” thrust on him by the Pope, he realizes that his current self has been produced by social and political institutions in the Western world which is “brought to believe that black is black and white is white and anyone who attempts to muddle the two is an idiot” (7). In the Introduction to the text, Hall mentions that Menen detested labels—“as a child he was a ‘Eurasian’, then almost a term of abuse. Later he became an Indo-European and later still he was horrified to hear himself described as an Indo-Anglian” (x). His scepticism also allows him to reject Western philosophy in the form of Descartes’ famous dictum “I think therefore I am” where the conscious subject is an embodied ‘I’ whose subjectivity is intrinsic and immutable. For Menen, the ‘I’ is not pre-given but has to be imagined and constructed on an everyday basis. In *Dead Man in the Silver Market* he concludes—“he [Descartes] was part of a mechanical universe even more rigid and predetermined than my grandmother’s” (30). In the postcolonial times which particularly celebrate hybridity and reject racial purity, the self is bereft of any centre and constantly in the process of making and unmaking. Menen’s current self therefore has to be unpacked through the principles enshrined in the Upanishads.

Menen’s attack on organized religion is further projected by his re-visiting of established religious texts. At University College, London, he wrote a play *Genesis 2* that began with “a dialogue between God and a fertilized egg cell” and resulted in a legal battle on blasphemy and obscenity (*The Space Within* 31). Commenting on Christianity’s discomfort with sex, it took him a while to understand that “the fertilization of the egg cell had been an obscene affair” (33). It anticipates his subversive retelling of *The Ramayana* that is still banned in India. Attacking another popular Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata* he remarks how women are described in the text as an “all-devouring curse” (*The New Mystics* 27). While Menen identified as an anti-imperialist and worked with the likes of Krishna Menon to espouse the cause of Indian freedom struggle, he is relentless in exposing the social inequalities that are perpetuated by the Hindu caste system. In the aftermath of Darwinism that advocated compulsory heteronormativity, Carpenter associated civilization with a disease that plagues the imperialist agenda (Copley 24). Menen believes that this obsession with colour and civilization is more intrinsic to the Indian milieu by tracing the battle between races to the history of Aryan-Dravidian conflict. Recalling the theory of “white” Aryans’ systematic domination of a “superior” “black” Dravidian race, he comments – “the Aryans developed a whole tribe of witches, or rather wizards, for they were all male. These male witches were the Brahmins” (*The New Mystics* 16). He adds how these “witches” are responsible for formulating the caste system which “no totalitarian dictator has dared to copy” (17).

Though hardly a feminist, Menen concludes that in the twentieth century the sixth caste has come to be the figure of the woman who is associated with pollution.

Menen's turn to the Upanishads is an attempt to seek out a more equitable society by forging friendship across time and space with fellow "rebels", the sages of Upanishads—"they were a strange lot, and the strangest thing about them is that they have influenced the world down to this day without making any effort to do so" (35). These sages spoke in Prakrit (rather than Sanskrit) which was then hardly the language of erudition. Their scepticism is not a result of alienation from their immediate surroundings but concerns with the care of the self, arising out of life instinct – not unlike the Freudian 'Eros'. The Foucauldian "care of the self" as an ethics that would lead to the construction of one's subjectivity is not a selfish act of indulgence but involves the well-being of the society at large. Menen, who resists most contemporary theorists, however suggests that although he recognizes his duties towards the society, it impinges on morality which is a fix code and like the law, can be discriminating. He remarks that "with the free consent of the British public a homosexual, if discovered, could be sent to jail for a number of years" (92).<sup>6</sup> In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle refers to three types of "philia" or friendship—that of utility, pleasure and good. Menen's affinity towards the sages of Upanishads can be categorized as a friendship of pleasure that allows him to see the rebels as a reflection of his own dissent. Menen's study of the Upanishads, however, cannot be equated with Forster's fascination with the Krishna cult or Carpenter's search for gay utopias that celebrate alternate sexuality. In fact, while these British writers manifest an increasing anxiety over the British legal system in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde's obscenity trial, Menen refuses to allow the legal framework to be at the centre of his resistance against dominant cultures. Displaying no discomfort with his sexuality, he is able to counter the idea of Christian sin which is equated with non-procreative sex by taking recourse to the Upanishad where a man who has found the "space within the heart" is incapable of sin as he goes beyond these worldly categories.

Menen does not embrace Indian (or rather Hindu) mysticism uncritically. In one of the concluding chapters of *The Dead Man in the Silver Market* he recollects his meetings with the fakirs and is particularly amused by the claims of Ramachandra who had held up his right arm above his head for twenty years for the "prestige of his country and the universe" (150). His oracular speech about the greatness of his country and religion echoes the self-assuredness of the Pope – both believing their utterances and opinions to be the ultimate truths. While Christopher Isherwood's guru Prabhavananda sees self-knowledge and search for *atman* as being integral to Vedantism and dismisses the Upanishads as "rather revelations and outpourings of inspired souls" (Copley 238), the *Vedas* according to Menen represent religious orthodoxy and hence are reduced to "claptrap, cooked up by a bunch of rogues" (33). As an interpreter of one culture to another, Menen uses *The New Mystics* to unpack the teachings of the Upanishads for the West. He writes—"The word 'Upanishad' itself means something to be kept secret and the sages stressed that it should be kept especially secret from fools" (35). The Upanishads therefore do not advocate a religion but an alternate way of life. They do not teach any moral lesson

like the *Bhagwat Gita* or prescribe any form of severe self-deprivation or bodily exercises like the fakirs. Menen describes them as the “first experiment in history in psychoanalysis” (*The Space Within* 10). This elaborate methodology for the formation of the self, commensurate with Foucault’s derivations on the techniques and the technologies of the self whereby “the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion” (qtd. in Kelly 517). It entails a degree of performativity akin to peeling of an onion that has to be reiterated to reach at the core of the self:

One by one you strip away those parts of your personality which consist of the things that you do because the world taught you to do them or made you do them. Layer by layer—your parents’ advice, your schooling, your job, your social position—all go. These are not you. Now is the turn of your most intimate affairs.... They too come... and go. At last you come to your loves, your sexual life with others. You cling to those. Surely they are your own? But they go. (*The Space Within* 8, 9)

The skins of the onion represent the public selves created by others while the centre, the very “core of my being” which Menen calls the “space within the heart” is an empty space signifying “nothing” (9). It reverses Descartes’ dictum to “I am therefore I think” (112). That the true self embodies “nothingness” is not a paradox and certainly does not imply a meaninglessness of life verging on the Thanatos. In fact Menen dismisses the idea that to live in the contemporary society can be alienating by referring to Jean-Paul Sartre – “but the philosopher of the meaninglessness of living did not achieve that status by turning his back on life” (35). Neither can it be explained in terms of Freud’s Unconscious since it reaches the realm of Superconscious through the systematic act of meditation nor can it imply the unification of the soul with god as in Christian mysticism. Menen’s “space within the heart” stands for the fullness of the void, the *atman-jnana* that disavows both reality and personality as worldly illusion or *maya*. Foucault argues that the inner self is “not something invented by the individual himself” but can be traced back to given “models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (qtd in Kelly 291). While the techniques of unpacking the self may not be distinct in Menen’s case, it is unique in its discovery of an “antechamber” (inside the space within the heart) that resists the intruder—“the locks of this antechamber should be well-oiled, ready to click shut against the intruder, and they come in many guises” (37).

## **Oedipal Mother**

In *The Space Within the Heart*, Menen suggests that his homosexuality is a result of his mother’s sexual desire for him thereby contesting a popular claim that sexuality is inborn. He comments—“Mothers are preoccupying, whether they are of flesh or stone. Mine certainly was. She wanted me to be her lover” (39). In his Introduction, Hall mentions that despite its brutal honesty, Menen manages to draw a touching portrait of a “beautiful woman liberated for her times, a woman who liked fun” and lead her life on her own terms (viii). Menen traces his mother’s desire to her obsession with the brown skin



—“‘when I was a little girl,’ she said, ‘we used to dress dolls to give the missionaries. I always chose a *brown* doll. I mean one with a brown face. Most of them were white: pink and white. But for me, no. I *had* to have a brown one” (26, 27). Incidentally Menen’s father’s first name is Kali meaning black. In *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir mentions that while the penis acts as a double for the boy child, a literal extension of his ego; the girl “would invent equivalents of the phallus: the doll that embodies the promise of the child may become a more precious possession than a penis” (82). Thus, Menen’s mother’s fixation on the brown doll that is an extension of her self, translates into a desire for her son which according to Freud is a substitute for the penis. At the age of sixteen Menen realizes that it is he who has engendered the crisis in his parents’ marital relationship. Though a young Menen tries to initially assess his relationship with his mother by taking refuge in psychoanalysis, he soon finds it limiting:

I could not for instance remember being envious of my father’s penis. I could not recall having seen it. But my self-esteem was greatly restored when I discovered, like as not, I would be a homosexual. This put me immediately in company of Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and less encouragingly Oscar Wilde. (42)

Recounting how he had to resist his mother’s attempts to kiss him passionately, the author provides a gentle critique of her obsession with beauty that would translate to affairs with other men.

Copley writes—“Interconnected with this battle over sexuality and the pursuit of the divine lies a conflict, may be of special intensity for homosexuals, over the material and the feminine. Ironically, by turning toward Hinduism, they exacerbated the problem for Hinduism is a belief system exceptional in its reverence for the feminine” (4). While this theory may explain Copley’s subjects’ fascination to Indian mysticism, it does not quite apply to Menen’s seeking of the self through the Upanishads which does not figure within the religious framework of mainstream Hinduism. In fact, the only reference to female worship in Menen’s text comes in his description of the doctrine of Tantra:

The followers of Tantra were admirers to the point of frenzy, of Woman, in all her aspects, the cruder the better. The apotheosis of Woman was the Mother, and the Tantric abased himself before Motherhood in a way that was not to find a parallel until twentieth century America. The tantric devotee longs for Mother to take him on Her lap. He yearns for the security of being between Her breasts, except when he is begging to suck Her milk. (*The New Mystics* 89, 90)

Unlike the Upanishads or Vedanta, the Tantra is a philosophy that is concerned intimately with the sexual drive. Menen gives an elaborate account on how to derive spiritual bliss from sexual acts – “Nirvana can be attained by having sex to the point of utter exhaustion” (90). It is therefore surprising that none of Copley’s subjects take refuge in this cult that would have perfectly legitimized their sexualities as well as empower them to come to terms with the absent mother figures in their lives—be it in due to death (as in the case of Carpenter) or estrangement (as in the case of Isherwood). With respect to Forster’s “overprotective” mother, Copley wonders “did her emotional demands inhabit her

relationships with women?” (122). Though Menen displays a similar horror for intimacy; it is not specific to women and can be attributed to an inhibited self as a result of his mother’s sexual advances. Emphasizing the need to give up all “appetites” to find the self, he mentions that while “eating was a profound nuisance”, “sex did not trouble me” (*The Space Within* 22).

*The Space Within the Heart* in its essence is a treatise on love and loneliness. Written shortly after his mother’s death, it gave Menen “more trouble than any other book he ever wrote” (vii). The author is haunted by his cold embrace of his mother hours before her death from cancer. Having judged her for her sexual proclivities, Menen now interrogates his response by having a dialogue between his two polarized selves. While one suggests that “the cold embrace was the most honest act of your life, but you won’t admit it”, the other dismisses it as “cruel and I am not a cruel man” (48). It is this confrontation with his alter-ego that leads him to the space within the heart. Menen’s coldness can be explained in terms of his obsession with privacy. He does not answer any of his father’s letters which contained accounts of his mother’s affair with a building contractor who would die from one of Hitler’s bombs.

Copley writes that “coping with death is the ultimate test of mysticism” (85). While *The Space Within the Heart* begins with a light-hearted reference to death as a far-off reality—“He (Gotlieb) is gathering my manuscripts ...believing that they will be of some use when I am well and truly dead” (4)—Menen’s posthumously published *It is All Right* is a more intimate account of deaths, be it that of his mother, the Jew in Austria or well-known personalities like John F. Kennedy. Menen reveals how after being diagnosed with cancer, his mother had requested him to help her commit suicide, putting him in a dilemma with respect to his new faith—“good catholic or good son?” (*It is All Right* 124). Ironically Menen too would later be diagnosed with cancer and like his mother contemplates on taking his life. He mentions that it is his trust in his friend, Graham Hall and the latter’s honesty that kept him going. As Menen refuses to be used as a “guinea-pig for doctors” or be “vegetable shunted from bed to bed” Hall assures him that he won’t stand in his way if the situation is hopeless (135). In the introduction to posthumous edition of *The Space Within the Heart*, Hall remarks that he kept his promise—“I did find out from the doctors that there was no hope for him and I did, against the doctor’s advice, tell him. It did take courage but I found somewhere” (xiii). While as a celebrity, Menen is usually given preference over others in the queue to the Cancer Centre, on one rare occasion he has to make room for a nine-year-old patient—“It is said that when a writer dies he is helped across the line by a small child, perhaps the child he was, perhaps not... it seemed that the child had come to me” (*It Is All Right* 138). *It Is All Right* attempts an epistemology of death by interspersing Menen’s personal conflicts with commentaries on death as a form of self-awakening. This initially leads him to Mother Teresa who sees death as an act of mercy although the process itself can be lonesome. Later Menen takes refuge in *Katha Upanishad* which tells us the story of Nachiketa who goes to the house of Yama, the god of Death for self-knowledge. In a complex dialogue between Yama and Nachiketa, the former struggles to answer the boy child’s questions about the meaning of death and whether it entails an annihilation of the ego. In

*Death, Contemplation and Schopenhauer* (2007) R Raj Singh remarks that this philosophical enquiry is a concern for the self—"we cannot fail to notice that the Upanishad regards death-contemplation as an all-important but enigmatic issue that is intimately connected with the knowledge of the Self, that is a self-realization in this very life. The key word *samparaye* ("the world beyond") ... refers to passing-on from the life of *maya* ("illusory worldliness") to a contemplative life led in the light of self-knowledge" (16). Thus, when the bondage to *maya* is destroyed by self-knowledge and a person arrives at the "space within"; death ceases to be a radical event that may evoke any fear for the Unknown. Like the systematic stripping of the many public selves, dying for Menen becomes a performance to be learned to make life more meaningful. It is not a melancholia that grasps the senile but a constructive activity akin to the technologies of the self.<sup>8</sup>

### The Jewish Question

In *Dead Man in the Silver Market* Menen's sexuality and ethnicity result in a denunciation of racial prides of the British and the Nairs as he refuses to allow them to shape his identity. This critique of dominant cultures results in a similar exposure of the horrors of the Holocaust. While Menen believes that he has failed to conform to the Christian doctrine of "love your neighbour", he expresses concerns over growing anti-Semitism in rest of Europe. Violence as a spectacle does not manage to move us unless it takes place in our close proximity. Like the death of an aged Indian shot by a British soldier in *Dead Man in the Silver Market*, *It Is All Right* describes in vivid details the murder of a Jew in Austria. Menen highlights the complicity and casual disinterest on the part of the public as witnesses to such acts of crime. His decision to shoot a documentary in Austria was a result of his acquaintance with Norbert Elias, a Jewish refugee from Germany. Having been born to immigrant parents, Menen can empathize with Norbert's diasporic consciousness. The latter mentions that the world is yet to comprehend the horror of concentration camps—"if they were prisons it would be all right. You come out of prisons. But in camps you die. That is the terrible thought" (148).<sup>9</sup> While Norbert finds refuge in Britain, the former Professor at Frankfurt University now teaches as a "University Extension lecturer, the lowest level in the then educational hierarchy of Britain and the worst paid" (Menen 150). As his room and a sheet of paper titled 'Chapter One' stand testimony to his failure to overcome the trauma of migration, he wishes he had died in the concentration camp so that people would at least express sympathy for a wasted talent.

The death of the Jew allows Menen to seek solace in the Catholic Church—"one institution which gave me a sense of a continuing civilization" (142). This is ironic given his denunciation of the civilizing missions of British imperialism. While Menen is aware of the hypocrisies of the church, he is too disillusioned by the war to seek refuge elsewhere. It may also be a result of his attempt to redeem his relationship with his mother. Menen's empathy with the victims of the Holocaust extends into a similar

care for the Israelis and a problematic dismissal of Muslim community as also evident from his comment on Mohammad Jinnah, the leader of Indian Muslim League.

## Conclusion

In *The Man Who Would Be Queen: Autobiographical Fictions* Hoshang Merchant writes—“The art of living is the art of creating life-fictions” (196). The subtitle suggests that there is no essential difference between facts and fictions with the latter being a farcical version of life. Consequently, the act of memory retrieval is not fraught with unreliability but implies a deliberate attempt by the author to play with these categories. Menen’s two works *The Space Within the Heart* and *It Is All Right* advocate an epistemology of the self that blurs any essentialist distinctions between life and death. Like the very act of autobiographical writing, it espouses a kind of ritualistic investment in the process of survival. As a cosmopolitan Menen’s cultural capital enables him to transcend not only boundaries of life and death but those of modern nation-states. It is an investment in cultural studies whereby he re-invents the Upanishad to study contemporary questions of race, ethnicity and sexuality. As a testimony to the author’s negotiation with loneliness, these texts also suggest the innate contradictions that characterize the struggles of queer lives.

## Notes

1. The term ‘third gender’, however, has come to be increasingly associated with the transgender, the transsexual and the intersex.
2. While Section 377 criminalizes any non-procreative sexual activities that also affect heterosexuals, it is specifically used to target homosexuals.
3. Homonationalism refers to a “facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality” (Puar 337).
4. Take for example the 2016 mass shooting at Pulse, a gay night club in Orlando, that has once again allowed mainstream media to conflate Islam with homophobia, ignoring the complexities of the shooter’s own sexuality and mental state.
5. Merchant, however writes—“*Manusmriti* says a gay should be sewn up in the vagina of a cow. Is this fantasy punishment?” (*Forbidden Sex, Forbidden Texts* 9)
6. The Labouchere Amendment of 1885 had criminalized all forms of sexual activities between men. Oscar Wilde was convicted under it.
7. This short autobiographical narrative was published in 1991 together with the second edition of *The Space With the Heart*.

8. This is strongly reminiscent of the commentary on life and death in Isherwood's *A Single Man* (1964) where the spiritual purification of the carnal body anticipates the methodical nature of George's death that is a means to self-transcendence.
9. Author Ruth Praver Jhabvala who escaped from the Nazi regime remarks—"once a refugee, always a refugee" ("Brave New Worlds").

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**Rajorshi Das** is a research scholar and poet invested in queer and diaspora studies. He currently teaches as an assistant professor (ad-hoc) at Indraprastha College for Women.

Email: [dasraajorshi@gmail.com](mailto:dasraajorshi@gmail.com)

## **The Homosexual Male Gaze: Normalizing Homosexuality through the Use of Heteronormative Techniques in Film**

Lauren M. Rohrs, Graduate Student, Notre Dame of Maryland University

In recent months, the film company Disney came under scrutiny as it was announced that a character in the 2017 film *Beauty and the Beast*, LeFou, was being portrayed as homosexual (Izadi). As a result, the film has been boycotted and banned in Kuwait and select theaters in Alabama, Russia, and Malaysia (*Washington Post*), yet while watching the film there is no overt “gay scene”, meaning a kiss (or more) between two characters of the same sex, that could be seen as a point of contention for homophobic viewers; what then makes this character so controversial? The sexuality of the character in question is made clear to the audience almost exclusively through his use of “the look” and the male gaze when looking towards his love interest, Gaston. The sexual tension, attraction, and desire experienced by LeFou are recognized by the audience, despite a lack of sexual advancement, declaration of love, or other overt references to the character’s sexuality. While in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Mulvey was strictly describing women as the objects of “the male gaze”, her statement that the way characters have been “displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 270) can be, in this case, applied to a male character who is the object of the male gaze. In *Beauty and the Beast*, the love interest of the gay character becomes the object of the male gaze and undergoes a similar transformation; his desirability is largely communicated to the audience through the use of the male gaze, while the sexual orientation of “the looker” is expressed in a similar fashion to the traditional presentation of attraction from heterosexual male characters—by observing another man as an “erotic object”, the sexual orientation of this character is communicated without the need to announce to the audience that the character is homosexual or to exaggerate the character’s behavior to match a heterosexual audience’s stereotype of what it means to “act gay”.

Through an examination of the 2017 film adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, Mulvey’s theoretical work on the male gaze, and Dyer’s criticism of the portrayal of homosexual men in media, I will argue that the use of the male gaze by a homosexual character serves as a powerful narrative tool, sexual identifier, and normalization tool that can indicate the sexuality of the homosexual character without exaggeration and in such a way that helps to normalize homosexual relationships through the use of widely accepted and normalized indicators of heterosexual attraction in film. For the purposes of this paper, a “normalization tool” refers to a narrative or other film technique that presents a non-normalized identity in a normal way, with the goal (or result) of presenting the non-normalized identity to audiences in a non-exaggerated and non-threatening way that allows the audience to experience the

non-normalized identity as a normal part of the film's (and reality's) society. A normalization tool applies accepted narrative techniques to non-normalized identities in film, making the actions of the non-normalized identities recognizable, familiar, and comfortable. In theory, exposure to ideas and identities in film or television can increase acceptance of the views and perspectives offered, as argued by Hust, et.al.'s study, which found that exposure to the television show *Law and Order: SVU* "lowers rape myth acceptance and increases sexual assault prevention" (1369). Theoretically, similar audience attitude adjustments towards non-normalized identities may result from exposure to these identities through non-exaggerated presentations in film.

### **Beauty and the Beast and Homosexuality**

The example of homosexual male gaze utilized in this paper is that of the 2017 live action film adaptation of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. The film became a topic of controversy when it was announced that one of the film's characters, LeFou, would appear as Disney's first openly homosexual character. His love interest, Gaston, remained heterosexual, and the film lacked a definitive moment in which LeFou's sexuality was explicitly stated; apart from a brief moment in the film's final scene in which LeFou is accidentally "handed" a male dance partner in a ballroom scene, the entirety of his storyline as a gay man relies on a series of "looks" that he directs towards Gaston. These looks, which are prevalent throughout the first half of the movie, dwindle and eventually cease to occur towards the end of the movie, when the message of Gaston's attractiveness turns to one of his villainy. The use of the male gaze as a signifier of LeFou's sexual orientation (as opposed to a verbal declaration of his sexuality, physical romantic contact between his character and Gaston, or an exaggerated flamboyance in his personality) presents homosexuality in a similar fashion as heterosexuality has been traditionally portrayed in film. Although this film was met with hostility because of this character's sexual orientation, the majority of this negative backlash occurred before the film's release, indicating that any anger incited by this character's sexual orientation came from those who learned of his sexual orientation through news media sources, and not through an experience with the character interactions within the film. Using this film as an example, an examination of the homosexual male gaze as a sexual identifier, narrative tool, and normalization tool in the context of existing film theories can be applied and examined in the context of the interactions between the characters of LeFou and Gaston.

### **Mulvey's Male Gaze**

Mulvey's theory on the male gaze in film can be largely summarized in her statement "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (Mulvey 270). Mulvey's theory on male-female interactions in film "takes as starting point the way film reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual



difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (Mulvey 267), establishing the earliest examination of the subliminal ways in which film reflects and feeds into patriarchal society through the use of what Mulvey defines as “the male gaze”, a filming technique that plays into scopophilia and allows viewers to experience a film (and its female characters) through the perspective of the leading male character. Mulvey criticizes the use of this film technique in response to the idea of scopophilia, which she defines as “taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling or curious gaze” (Mulvey 269); for Mulvey, “psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (Mulvey 267). For Mulvey, the objectification of women in film feeds into patriarchal norms and views of women, however she also views film as a potentially valuable psychoanalytic model, stating “as an advanced representation system, the cinema poses questions of the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (Mulvey 268). For Mulvey, this tool, which results in the objectification of women for the pleasure of both the male character that presents the point of view as well as for the pleasure of the audience, is the result of the unconscious human structures of pleasure as well as the fodder that feeds into this structure.

Of Mulvey’s claims, the most significant to an examination of the homosexual male gaze is her claim that “sexual instinct and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire” (270). Through this statement, Mulvey identifies patriarchal film techniques, such as “the look” and the male gaze, as symbolic of sexual instinct and *identification*; those characters who present the male gaze towards female characters are identified to the audience as heterosexual, with their objects of desire easily identified as the women to whom they direct their gaze. When this technique is applied to a homosexual male character, the same inferences can be drawn from the object of his gaze, identifying him as homosexual based on his gaze towards another man/men.

### **Homosexual Male Gaze as a Sexual Identifier in *Beauty and the Beast***

Mulvey’s claim that “sexual instinct and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire” (270) presents a strong argument for the use of the male gaze from a homosexual male character to another male character as a sexual identification tool in film. As Mulvey determines that patriarchal narrative film techniques are symbolic of sexual instinct, sexual identification, and desire, it can be argued that these same tools, when presented from the point of view of a homosexual male character, are capable of identifying the character’s sexual orientation, as well as the object of his desire. In the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, the use of typically patriarchal narrative tools serve to narrate the sexual identification of the character, LeFou. In an almost perfectly mirrored moment in the film, Gaston, who opens the scene by viewing his female object of desire through a telescope (an almost too-perfect parallel to the film *Rear Window*, highlighted by Mulvey as an example of the male gaze), becomes the object of the homosexual male gaze as his

companion, LeFou, gains the position of the possessor of the male gaze, making Gaston the newly highlighted object of desire. In this scene, the audience is presented with two instances of the male gaze, one which meets viewer expectations as “the norm” and another that introduces the homosexual male gaze and the idea of a male character becoming the object of the male gaze.

### **Homosexual Male Gaze as a Narrative Tool in *Beauty and the Beast***

The use of the male gaze by LeFou towards Gaston plays two major roles in the narration of the film; indicating LeFou’s sexual orientation, and guiding the storyline as the attractiveness of Gaston declines for both the audience and LeFou. In the film, Gaston is originally presented as a brainless but hopelessly in love young veteran; though hardly perfect, he is intended to be viewed as desirable by the audience, as the interactions between himself and other characters relies heavily on the understanding that he is a beloved member of the community. As a remake, the 2017 version of *Beauty and the Beast* faced a potentially difficult narrative dilemma; since the majority of the audience would be familiar with Gaston’s villainy, presenting him as a desirable character (and thus setting him up for his decline into undoubtable villainy) would require a creative re-presentation of his character. By making Gaston the object of the male gaze through the view of LeFou, Disney was able to reestablish Gaston as an object of desire; conversely, as the film progresses and Gaston descends into villainy, the presence of the male gaze decreases and eventually ceases, removing any indicators that Gaston could be viewed as desirable. This use of the male gaze in *Beauty and the Beast* is in line with Mulvey’s observation about female characters, as she observes “traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium” (Mulvey 270). The use of the homosexual male gaze in the 2017 adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast* serves a similar role, presenting not only LeFou’s view of Gaston as an “erotic object” but also establishing his erotic nature for the audience. The desire of LeFou for Gaston also works within the context of the theories of Shuckmann, who views the male gaze as “a double structure of desire that establishes a model for the relationship between the male spectator and the image: on the one hand, he desires to possess the image....and, on the other hand, he desires to be or to become the image” (Shuckmann 673). This analysis of the male gaze in the context of a homosexual character pertains particularly well to the *Beauty and the Beast* example, as in the original Disney adaptation of the story, LeFou is presented as a hero-worshiper of Gaston (he wishes to be the image) while in the 2017 adaptation of the story, LeFou is seen to both desire to “possess the image” and to “be the image”.

The use of the male gaze as a narrative tool to establish LeFou’s sexuality is more to the point of this argument; by choosing to establish LeFou’s sexuality almost exclusively through “the look” and the male gaze, Disney presented his character as homosexual without falling into the trap of exaggeration. The character’s storyline, which revolves largely, but not exclusively, around his desire for Gaston and Gaston’s approval, requires an establishment of his sexual orientation, making the film’s use of the

male gaze an important narrative tool for LeFou's character development. As it pertains to the field of Cultural Studies, this requirement presents an interesting conundrum; if the ultimate goal of the filmmakers is to normalize homosexuality in film and society, does attempting to highlight the sexual orientation of a character as a major part of the character's makeup counter the goal of normalization? In other words, does making efforts to ensure that the audience recognizes a character's sexual orientation negate the normalization techniques used to relate the character's sexuality, as these attempts make sexual orientation the primary focus of the characterization of the character in question? At this point, the field of Cultural Studies has largely failed to examine this conundrum; the only other work that fully addresses the concept of the homosexual male gaze simply addresses "the gaze [as] the way to point out the gayness" (Gokcem 90) and does not address the potential roadblock to normalization presented by the use of the homosexual male gaze. Future research in the field of Cultural Studies is needed to examine how media, including film, can accomplish the presentation of non-heterosexual characters in the same way that heterosexual characters are presented, without making sexual orientation the most significant aspect of the character(s) in question. While the adoption of normalized sexual narrative techniques is a step in the right direction, more theoretical examinations of other narrative techniques and other forms of media may help to fine-tune film and media attempts at the normalization of non-heterosexuality.

### **Homosexual Male Gaze as a Normalization Tool**

Apart from the sexual identification and narrative aspects of the homosexual male gaze, the use of this tool can also (and perhaps most significantly) help to normalize homosexuality through the use of the narrative tools that have been used to indicate heterosexual attraction for decades. By appropriating these tools for homosexual characters, film makers have the power to relay sexual orientation of characters in a way that has been accepted as the norm for heterosexual characters, thereby meeting the audience within its comfort zone and working within a framework familiar to the audience. By thus presenting homosexual attraction on screen, filmmakers are able to escape the use of homosexual stereotypes, as well as overt references to a character's sexuality, while still narrating that the character is non-heterosexual. In this way, homosexual characters can simply exist within a film without their sexuality being the main feature of their character; they can be simply *characters*, as opposed to strictly *homosexual characters*. This shift away from presenting stereotypical homosexual male characters may answer the arguments of Richard Dyer, as explored in the following section.

### **Dyer's Homosexual Stereotyping**

Richard Dyer's opinion on the stereotyped representation of homosexuals in film is unquestionably negative, as he opens his essay *Stereotyping* stating "gay people, whether activists or not, have resented

and attacked the images of homosexuality in films (and the other arts and media) for as long as we have managed to achieve any self-respect...the principle line of attack has been on stereotyping” (Dyer 275). Dyer’s essay, which examines the social and political objectives in the stereotyped presentation of homosexual people in media, criticizes the ways in which films stereotype homosexual people and seeks to both understand why these stereotypes are so prevalently reinforced in film, as well as determine the remedy for appropriately identifying homosexual characters without exaggerated stereotyping.

There can be no doubt that most stereotypes of gays in films are demeaning and offensive. Just think of the line-up – the butch dyke and the camp queen, the lesbian vampire and the sadistic queer, the predatory school-mistress and the neurotic faggot, and all the rest. The amount of hatred, fear ridicule and disgust packed into those images is unmistakable. (Dyer 275)

Dyer refers to Klapp to define the difference between stereotypes and social types; in his argument, Klapp defines these two concepts as “...stereotypes refer to things outside one’s social world, whereas social types refer to things with which one is familiar; stereotypes tend to be conceived as functionless or dysfunctional (or, if functional, serving prejudice and conflict mainly), whereas social types serve the structure of society at many points” (Klapp 16). For Dyer, people are condemned to their stereotypes, which are “characteristically fixed, clear-cut, unalterable” and come from external sources, including society, film, and media (Dyer 277). In the context of this paper, Dyer’s examination of stereotypes is significant as it highlights stereotyping as a phenomenon enforced from external sources (i.e. societal expectations, film representations, etc.) and as a negative influence on both homosexual individuals (who become objects of ridicule in film) and the heteronormative population (which has its stereotypes about homosexual people confirmed through the stereotyped presentation of homosexual characters in films). These stereotypes are presented and enforced largely through iconography, which uses “a certain set of visual and aural signs which immediately bespeak homosexuality and connote the qualities associated, stereotypically, with it” (Dyer 278). Dyer points to the desire of the audience (and society in general) to typify individuals, placing them in “simple, vivid, memorable, easily-grasped and widely recognized characterization[s] in which a few traits are foregrounded and changed or ‘development’ is kept to a minimum” (Dyer 276). This typifying and stereotyping of homosexual characters not only enforces stereotypes, but also generally does not allow for the development of a character that has been typed as homosexual; this becomes the only significant trait for the character, who’s character growth cannot extend beyond the limits set for the “type” to which it is assigned. Although Dyer does not say as much, it is arguable that homosexual characters, within these constraints, cannot be seen as “people” but only as their “type”, with character development outside of their “type” becoming impossible as long as the “type” is a primary component of the character’s self.

### **The Homosexual Male Gaze as Unexaggerated Portrayal of Homosexuality in *Beauty and the Beast***

Although much of LeFou's character centers on his secret sexual orientation, with the majority of his ethical decisions being based on his desire for and subsequent desire to please Gaston, his character, unlike many criticized by Dyer, has depth beyond his sexual orientation and does not fall into any homosexual stereotype; he is neither a "camp queen" nor a "sadistic queer" and he is presented without that exaggerated flamboyance that often signifies a homosexual character's sexual orientation. Beyond his non-stereotypical presentation as a homosexual male character, LeFou also proves capable of developing as a character outside of his sexuality. Throughout the film, as Gaston's actions prove him to be a villain, LeFou's attraction towards Gaston is seen to dwindle, as his use of "the look" and the male gaze reduce until they cease to exist. He ultimately finds his own ethical stance, changing his loyalties away from Gaston, and proves capable of standing alone as a character beyond his sexual orientation. Conversely, the final scene of the film, which incited controversy from a homophobic population, maintains LeFou's sexual orientation, establishing that his homosexuality has been, and remains to be, a part of his character; he may have lost his feelings for Gaston, but his sexual orientation is still a significant part of who he is a character.

In addition to (and in conjunction with) these benefits of utilizing the male gaze to establish homosexual orientation, the use of this tool is also significant because of its deeply rooted history in heterosexual narratives; since early Hollywood, the male gaze has served to indicate to audiences the attraction of a male character to his female object of desire; as a long-established narrative tool, the male gaze has become a subconsciously accepted indicator of sexual attraction between a heterosexual couple. As such, the male gaze, when applied to a male character by another male character, remains an accepted, subconscious indicator of sexual attraction; the male gaze is much more subtle than sexual contact between two characters, and yet the same message of sexual attraction is relayed to the viewer. Unlike sexual contact between characters (i.e. a kiss, sexual intimacy, etc.), the male gaze is one-sided (thus requiring only one homosexual character to be utilized) and does not cross into a territory that can "threaten" the views or beliefs of a heterosexual viewer. While the opinion of a homophobic individual should not matter for a homosexual individual, if a film (or any other type of media) is attempting to dissolve those "fears" and stereotypes that shape homophobia, it is helpful to the cause to present homosexuality in a normalized but subtle manner. This approach challenges stereotypes about homosexual individuals by presenting non-stereotyped examples of homosexuality, but also works within the comfort zone of an audience that may not be receptive to overt references to homosexuality, granting an opportunity to slowly introduce the idea of homosexuality as a normal form of sexual orientation. Returning to the work of Gokcem, the use of the male gaze by homosexual characters creates a level of transparency for the homosexual character and makes a traditionally hidden identity visible and knowable (88). Theoretically, the fear of the unknown as it pertains to non-heterosexuality is alleviable when exposure to normalized homosexual relationships is made possible; Gokcem quotes the film *A Single Man*, "if those minorities are somehow invisible, the fear is much greater. The fear is why the minority is persecuted. The cause is fear. Minorities are just

people. People like us” (Gokcem 88). The presentation of homosexual characters in film in general allows for visibility and, hypothetically, an alleviation of fear of the unknown for a heterosexual audience; when filmmakers present homosexual characters through the use of normalized narrative techniques, this visibility becomes even stronger, as heterosexual audiences are not only exposed to homosexuality, but are able to experience character interactions that are familiar; they can see that the homosexual characters are “people like us”.

While for Disney a release of this character’s sexuality was received negatively in some areas of the country/world, the use of “the look” between non-heterosexual characters has the power to help to normalize non-heterosexuality in society as the message about character sexuality is sent and received in a normalized, un-exaggerated, and “unthreatening” manner; the attraction simply exists and is communicated in the same way that heterosexual attraction has been communicated in film for decades, without the need to place LeFou within a traditional stereotype of homosexual men or to typify him through homosexual iconography through his movements or style of clothing. “The look” is a powerful cinematic tool that is shifting its purpose from presenting a male character’s desire for a female character, to normalizing relationships outside of the heterosexual pairings common in films. The use of the male gaze by homosexual characters could prove to be a powerful technique in cinematic attempts to present homosexuality in a normalized and non-exaggerated way.

## **Future Research**

In the future, this research will examine the ethical question of the use of the male gaze and whether the application of this narrative tool to homosexual men is more, less, or equally impermissible to the application of the same tool towards female characters. Although it has been argued that “even though in the gay gaze there is also an objectified one, as it is in the same sex it just represents the gaze which reflects the secret feelings to the other man, but not reduces the other one in an inferior position” (Gokcem 90) I believe that a closer examination of the treatment of homosexual individuals and heterosexual women in film is needed to better understand the standards to which society holds the treatment of these different groups. Although I argue for the benefits of utilizing the male gaze to normalize homosexuality in film, I am hesitant to any claims that homosexual men can ethically be objectified through the male gaze any more than is permissible for heterosexual women. Future research will also examine the use of “the look” or gaze by and between lesbians in film in order to compare the ways in which male and female homosexuality are treated in film, and the ways in which homosexual and heterosexual women are treated in film.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of the male gaze by a homosexual male character can prove to be a powerful tool to relay the character's sexual orientation; as a subtle narrative device that indicates the object of a character's desire, the male gaze has the capacity to alert the audience of a character's sexual orientation without the need to revert to stereotypes, iconography, or exaggeration. Although the male gaze has been criticized when used between heterosexual male and female characters, the use of the male gaze in a homosexual context may be a valuable tool in normalizing homosexuality to a heterosexual audience.

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**Lauren Rohrs** is a dual-enrolled graduate student at Notre Dame of Maryland University, currently pursuing two graduate degrees in Contemporary Communications and English Literature. Lauren has a BA degree in Liberal Arts in Philosophy and Psychology and is interested in interdisciplinary approaches to film and literature.





## Portrait of Hiccup as a Transman

Dr Charlie Oughton, Lecturer in Media Communications, Regent's University London

*How To Train Your Dragon's* importance as a gender-defying narrative hinges on its relationship with its target, family audience. Therefore, it is necessary to overview how the narrative of the first film increases the significance of the character of Hiccup in the audiences' eyes. The franchise initially achieved social and critical note owing not to its plot, but to the way the plot highlights its treatment of its central character. The plot is as follows: Hiccup is a member of a Viking tribe based on the Archipelago island of Berk. The island is attacked by dragons that steal its livestock each night, leading to the destruction in the village. Hiccup is the small, physically weak and rather clumsy son of the island's chief. He is a disappointment to his father not only because of his lack of physical prowess, but because of his character traits—he doesn't enjoy violence or relish the idea of being hurt, and this difference is only exacerbated by his decidedly unBerkish, acerbic humour—as he states “Pain. Love it” (DeBlois and Sanders) while looking decidedly unimpressed at the prospect of being burned alive by an angry reptile.

Hiccup tries to gain his father's approval and win his peers' respect by killing a dragon. Knowing that he lacks the physical prowess to do the deed manually, he constructs a catapult and succeeds in injuring the most dangerous beast there is. The dragon falls into a clearing and is trapped by a damaged tail that curtails its ability to fly. Finding himself emotionally unable to slay the creature owing to his empathy with its fear, Hiccup instead builds the dragon a tail that can be altered to match differing wind conditions via a mechanised stirrup that he operates. Using this device, Hiccup teaches the dragon, which he names Toothless, to fly again. They bond during this process. Hiccup discovers that the dragons attack the island only to secure food for their nest's queen, lest they are themselves eaten. The young Viking then defies his communities' tradition of killing dragons and is disowned by his father before riding Toothless to victory against the nest queen and saving his tribe in the process. During the battle, however, he sustains an injury leading to the loss of one of his legs below the knee. His actions earn him the respect of his father and village, but it is partly due to his injury that the film first came to prominence. While the production studio, DreamWorks, had already earned plaudits for its portrayal of the acceptance of identity in films including the *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson) franchise, *How to Train Your Dragon* (DeBlois and Sanders) was widely credited for showing a key human character undergo a major physical ‘incapacitation’ in a positive and indeed life affirming way (“How To Train Your Dragon” Refreshingly Pwds Friendly” and “Trivia”).

Hiccup's story arc led to the film being referenced by Jack Halberstam in his graduation speech to students at the University of Southern California at Berkeley. Halberstam uses the film as an analogy for the core tenant of his book, *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam surmises:

that in an age when our formula for success has become fused with making money, failure might offer us a critique of capitalism. And in an era when the only successful relationship is seen as one that lasts forever and is recognizable to the state, failure might offer us an avenue to alternative intimacies.

Simply put, if failure—here Hiccup’s inability to kill dragons - is a possible and indeed probable outcome in a social system based on hierarchy, then the social system does not work as it defines failure and therefore makes failure a probability. This, in turn, means the waste of at least some resources. Hiccup disrupts this idea by proving the worth of dragons. Obviously, this argument presupposes that capitalism is perceived as a social ill because it prioritises capital over relationships (which, especially when espoused within a Hollywood film, perhaps has to be taken with a pinch of salt, as is the dogma within the Humanities that capitalism is inherently immoral). What is important about Halberstam’s argument for a revised understanding of Hiccup as a depiction of cisgender failure and therefore transmasculine identity is the way in which Halberstam uses him as an analogy for the outsider who is able to critique the existing social system and, therefore, assist in its modification.

Halberstam focuses on Hiccup’s actions and their implications for his appearance as a demonstration of the character’s queerness. Halberstam comments that:

Toothless learns to fly with a broken tail and Hiccup learns to ride him with a broken foot. The film also has some pretty great scenes involving prosthetic body bits, leather harnesses, flight, invention and the physics of navigation.

In this sense, Hiccup is perceived ‘different’ because he works to develop a relationship with the ‘banned’ other and because the prosthesis he uses to facilitate that creates a link between himself and that other’s body so that they can work together.

Halberstam’s argument appears to carry some weight if one considers any break from traditional hegemonies as ‘queering’, as a combination of Marxist and Freudian analysis will now demonstrate. This is particularly in terms of Halberstam’s argument in *The Queer Art of Failure*. By working with Toothless, Hiccup has indeed upended the assumption of a speciesist dialogue against the dragons and in doing so created the possibility for a socialist system where the Vikings and the dragons can work and live together, jointly becoming the means of production (as there is no mention of economic social classes in the first film). The village even appears to support this paradigm. This is shown in the first film’s finale. When Hiccup wakes from unconsciousness following the final battle, it is Toothless—rather than his father or potential girlfriend—who waits for him in the private, inner space of his bedroom. As Hiccup awakes, the dragon licks his face—which could be interpreted as pet-like or suggestive of sexual intimacy. Hiccup is so shocked that he initially presumes he has died. He then discovers his leg stump and the addition of a simple, metallic prosthetic. The dragon helps him to the door, where he is greeted by the view of Berk rebuilt by the partnership of Vikings and the dragons. His father, Stoic, has revised his opinion that “all of” (DeBlois and Sanders) his son was to be derided

as a deviation from Viking (male) ideals and instead embraces him as a result of it. The most telling moment, however, is the dedication of the prosthesis devised by his mentor, Gobber, “with a little Hiccup flair thrown in” (ibid.). The “flair” is a deviation from the standard. The other Vikings have simple prosthesis—Gobber has a peg leg and a hook for a hand. A peg leg would enable Hiccup to retain as functional a life as the other Vikings and (judging by sequences in *How to Train Your Dragon 2*), ride a dragon as well as Gobber can. The reason for the different design of Hiccup’s appendage becomes apparent as the final credits roll—the size and shape of the metal design fit perfectly into replacement prosthetic tail that has been made for Toothless after his own was damaged in the battle that claimed Hiccup’s leg. By creating the prosthetic for both characters simultaneously, rather than simply showing Hiccup promising to make a new one as the credits play, it is made clear that the Vikings accept and support the bond between the two characters.

On a purely Freudian level (theoretical as opposed to clinical), the relationship could be interpreted as form of interspecies queering (Freud et al). Hiccup is framed as the (transmasculine) leader of the group because he leads with Toothless. He is also able to control (rather than instruct, as the others can) the dragon as his prosthesis operates Toothless’ tail and flying manoeuvres. It is then, obviously, very easy to declare that the community-given prosthesis acts as a queered phallus and symbol of his maturation to manhood. Toothless can only be ‘completed’ when his (queered, feminine) oval stirrup is filled by Hiccup’s straight-with-a-bend (bent) prosthesis. As Freud states: “All elongated objects, sticks, tree-trunks, umbrellas (on account of the opening, which might be likened to an erection), all sharp and elongated weapons, knives, daggers and pikes, represent the male member” (ibid.).

When Hiccup slots his prosthetic into Toothless’ awaiting cavity, the dragon is able fly and they go triumphantly into the sky to enjoy themselves as the credits roll and their communities cheer. The idea of them ‘taking each other to Heaven and back’ and its equation with emotional, if not obviously physical high (barring the suggested adrenaline rush) is obvious.

The problem with this reading comes with the assumptions made about the kind of queerness Hiccup embodies. Firstly, it is important to remember, as Eysenck pointed out, that Freud’s analysis was not clinically robust and as a result cannot be generalised. His work, as Eysenck states, was propaganda and literary art whose true importance was to present a language through which the idea of the psychological could be theorised. Freud’s importance in this regard goes without saying, but while his works are useful for generating discussion about the different readings that can be applied to texts such as the *How to Train Your Dragon* franchise, that is not to say that those readings are intended or even a connotation of the narrative. Indeed, the way in which they are applied whereby practically anything pointy can be considered as a phallus is far more indicative of the intentions of the reader who wields the theory.

This is very much the case with Halberstam, whose blog refers to the relationship between Hiccup and Toothless as a “queer and kinky alliance” formed by the “alternatively gendered person in a male

world” (ibid.). While acknowledging that Halberstam’s work is in line with the transspecies work of others including Harlan Weaver, part of the reason the *How to Train Your Dragon* franchise is so important is that it bucks even this trend for the radical in the politics of the personal.

It is difficult to argue that Hiccup views himself as “alternatively gendered” (Halberstam). While there is social pressure on him to fight, there is no direct evidence that he doesn’t, himself, initially want to fight and be traditionally masculine. He says he doesn’t like pain, but that’s not the same thing, particularly considering he would more likely be on the receiving end owing to his physique. Hiccup is, in fact, seen as “queer” (ibid.) not because he views himself differently, but because, as his mentor (Gobber) states, he is physically incapable of using weaponry (DeBlois and Sanders). He cannot act according to Berkian standards. Indeed, Hiccup tries to resolve this physical incapability to become a more effective Viking by creating technology that will alter the effects of his body.

What is more, Halberstam’s notion that Hiccup’s relationship with Toothless is “kinky” is rather beyond the scope of the franchise. It is made very clear that Hiccup’s romantic interest is with human females—Astrid in particular. To suggest that the bond between Hiccup and Toothless goes beyond the buddy-movie aesthetic into what Halberstam’s blog calls “erotic justice” because of the team’s physical proximity is to denigrate the importance of a bond that does not include the erotic. The extent to which there could be the possibility of such a bond were this not a franchise limited by its family-friendly focus is a point so academic as to make further discussion on the topic the realm of guesswork. Halberstam’s reading prioritises relationships that appear to dismantle existing sexual hegemonies largely for propaganda and in this instance, loses sight of the evidence in the text as a result. One must not forget, after all, that Hiccup is himself a construct. He doesn’t have any agency of his own. He’s a fictitious character devised by a cisgender female writer (Cowell) and adapted, in this instance, by a gay cisgender male director.

There is evidence that this director, Dean DeBlois, uses queer coding. He stated in mainstream media interviews (White) – part of Habermas’ “public sphere” – that Gobber is acknowledged as gay in *How to Train Your Dragon 2* though the reference that his unmarried status is the result being as a result of bickering and “One other reason” (DeBlois). DeBlois further stated that this is a direct reference to Gobber’s homosexuality. Furthermore, while it is not-explicit, this may be a reference to the illegality of same-sex marriage in various parts of the world. DeBlois is a gay man and as a result may be using this popular character’s lack of equality as a cipher for the (supposed) inappropriateness of this legislation. Indeed, the very fact that Gobber’s homosexuality has been confirmed by the director but is not explicitly stated is a reference to the cultural homophobia that still prevails enough to dissuade direct mention of Gobber’s orientation lest it impact on the attendance of audience members, such as those from religious backgrounds as discussed by Distant. DeBlois has ensured that the political messages he intends the public to take from the film and the film’s queer coding are made clear. To assume this

includes other permutations of LGBTQ identities beyond that, no matter how appealing this may be, is well-intentioned wishful thinking.

Hiccup isn't part of the queer community or indeed 'queer coded' in the way that Halberstam posits. That community is founded on philosophy that impacts on identity and behaviour. The real life queer community, and Hiccup's divergence from it, does indicate how he may be seen as queer.

So much queer theory, including Halberstam's, is grounded in philosophy. Owing to the queer movement's genesis and growth as part of various civil rights political movements, it is also heavily indebted to activism and, indeed, is often seen as a form of activism itself. Queer theory texts including Butler's seminal work describe how the authors think and feel the community can self-perceive in order to aid social progression. Indeed, the reason why Halberstam's blog has been chosen as a focus for this paper is because its original form—his address to graduating students—is designed as activism to encourage action, as he states: "This [Hiccup's] quiet moment of accountability is all that anyone is asking for as a prelude to another way of being in relation to others [...] You, Women and Gender Studies Majors of UC Berkeley, class of 2013, you are ready to ride your dragons, to ride with them, to blaze forward, to make change."

The 'peer review' of this work is pre-supposed by the very fact Halberstam was invited to speak. What he is saying is presumed accepted. There is, within this, the presumption that key ideals are presumed adopted, such as the necessity for autonomy, community and justice for all in the context of intersectionality that recognises diverse experience.

The politics of intersectionality has historically been demonstrated through gender expression—the visual representation that Halberstam highlights as being significant in Hiccup's representation. It can easily be found in the community itself in the form of the stereotypes associated with LGBTQ visibility discussed in articles including the work of Medhurst & Munt and Jay & Young. More recently, the visual expression of the rejection of binary gender normativity (in the case of trans masculinity) is via traditional masculinity in terms of the practicality associated with short hair and functional shirts but is then subverted through 'feminine' or frivolous touches such as bursts of colour that appear to disrupt the functionality demanded by capitalism. The visual emphasizes a formality of identity that reflects the anticipated perspectives of a community expected to be woke and aware of the supposed social construction of gender expression. The visual gender expression as a demonstration of shared community values and has become a symbol of the politics of the (hard) left.

Ironically, it is through Hiccup's alteration of his own behaviour and appearance that he becomes a new queer icon precisely because he bucks these behavioural and visual-political codes.

Hiccup is not, as Halberstam suggests, completely reclaimable as a peacekeeper or indeed as a cross-species lover. Instead, what propels the very narrative is that he is a Hiccup. In the words of *Portrait of Hiccup as a Buff Man*, he states "I mean, think about it. Even my name! You know, it's Viking tradition

to call the runt of the litter a hiccup” (Sanford and Bell). It is, however, more helpful to think of his name in both more literal and more ideological terms. A hiccup is an interruption of breath; an unexpected deviation from expectation.

In terms of pure self-fashioning, his costume is important. In the first film, Hiccup wears a simple green shirt and fur jerkin that is functional as covering and protection against the elements. It references his apparent inability to contribute to the community in opposition to the other Viking children who have bare arms and can brave the elements.

His appearance is an obvious indicator of his individualism particularly in the second film in which he has gained more control over his self-expression. Purely physically, Hiccup remains a hiccup. Rather choosing to draw him with a ‘heroic’, muscular build that could have easily been justified by a narrative of his increasing athleticism during adolescence as he learns to ride his dragon, DeBlois ensures the character remains lean. This is even emphasised by the sequence with girlfriend Astrid in which he strides around in mimicry of his father, Stoic the Vast, before Astrid comments on how his movements differ. What is more, an initial decision to base his adult facial appearance on actor Jake Gyllenhaal was cast aside because this was seen as being “too handsome, too heroic” (LaBrecque). His hair is also kept slightly longer than the other Viking men (barring the interchangeable twins, who are beyond the scope of this discussion) and his androgynous hairstyle, visually aligned to Berkian fashion only via the small braids added to the side. The aspect of costuming that could have tied him more clearly to a recognisable queer community and that is used in the second film—woad or makeup—is nowhere to be seen.

His appearance in the second film is significant as the first footage released to the public was the teaser trailer showcasing not Hiccup as heteronormative hero with Astrid in tow or Hiccup as warrior, but Hiccup as an objectified romantic icon. After a section that shows only snatches of his clothing as he flies with Toothless, the centrepiece is the reveal. Hiccup misjudges the descent and must be saved. The camera tracks up his body as he takes his helmet off.

Hiccup has made himself part-man, part machine. Gadgets are now what enable him to maintain his individualism. Rather than keeping them in a bag (and perhaps giving similar bags to the rest of his community), they become part of his lifestyle and his appearance. They compress time and of the limitations of humanity itself. They are stylistically similar to Steampunk, a fashion and culture that compacts time by using materials and styles associated with binary gender normative traditions of Victoriana alongside futuristic elements that emphasise the robotic and transhuman (as opposed to posthuman, as Keeling has discussed). For example, Hiccup has now adapted his community-given, prosthetic foot into a design feature that spins impressively to provide new implements. A knife (used for expression via sharpening his pencil) is attached as part of the design of his arm pad and a compass is incorporated into his other arm. Alongside this, of course, he has chosen posthuman aspects for the rest of his costume – the leather of his armour (with an asymmetrical shoulder that differentiates him

from a real dragon – he is a self-consciously constructed creature) as well as the wing-cape and dragon-spike mimicking scales that he puts on his helmet. He is not only transspecies, but translife and it must be said that if the attempt is to reclaim Hiccup as a standard bearer of leftist politics, his outfit is hardly vegan.

While his costume is a signifier for this attitude, the narrative arc of the second film's plot actually relies on his individualism. He is not a 'positive' role model. He acts based on his own moral interests rather than external expectations.

The opening of the second film demonstrates the dramatic tension that makes this plot interesting. After Hiccup's voiceover reintroduces audiences to the island of Berk, we witness how the Viking community have learned to live in harmony with the dragons and there is a segment where Hiccup's peers take part in a sports event of Dragon Racing. They are cheered on by the villagers... until comment is made by Hiccup's father that his son is, once again, absent. He is shirking expectation. The camera then cuts to a visually impressive action sequence where Hiccup and Toothless are seen embarking on dangerous and irresponsible stunts together. That this escapade is used to reward audiences and was used for the film's teaser trailer encourages audiences to root for Hiccup as an individual rather than as a tool of his community. The film expands on this through its main plotline, with Hiccup's arrogance leading him to ignore council and reignite tribal infighting that results in the death of his father.

Hiccup's leadership skills are only involved to resolve the mistakes he makes. He is not a calm, (feminine-coded) democratic empath and is in fact far more akin to antihero who has to be made to change his ways. However, unlike many anti-hero narratives, this is not a forced realisation or the result of another's intervention demonstrating the error of his ways. Instead, what happens is that his own experiences lead him to become his own type of leader by trying different strategies. He still takes risks, but becomes more aware of his characteristics. It is categorically not the case, however, that he is simply following the expected wisdom.

Hiccup's behaviour in the second film is not a one-off rite of passage, either. Background for the films' characters is given in the streamed series designed to maintain appetite for the film franchise. These plot the time between the first and second film. Notably, the series are intended for a different audience. The films are aimed at the family market, with *How to Train Your Dragon 2* (DeBlois) released on Fathering Sunday in the United Kingdom. The audience for the cartoons, however, has tended to be carers rather than children themselves. This is reflected in their content. They have far more adult humour, with sly references to drug use via a psychedelic chicken and a script that assumes the audience has an adult level of education, such as 'The Twins' detailed discussion their role as the classical "Greek chorus" of the narrative (Brooks). They also, of course, reference the literary and cinematic works that inspire the title and plot of each episode. These are not simple morality tales but complex discussions of the development of identity.

No more clearly is this the case than with the episode entitled *Portrait of Hiccup as a Buff Man*” (Sanford and Bell). Referencing Joyce’s *A Portrait of The Artist as a Young Man*, the plot follows the first film as Hiccup is adjusting to his new role in the community. It mirrors *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in depicting Hiccup as self-consciously writing his own dialogue. From the beginning of the first film’s first trailer the audience are introduced to his subjectivity through his sarcastic whispered asides. In *Portrait of Hiccup as a Buff Man* (Sanford and Bell) he sets the template for the leader that he will become by showing how he feels how he feels the customs of his community are alien and constructed by political actors (what Halberstam correctly refers to as the Vikings’ “toxic masculinity”) that must be questioned, if not deconstructed.

In this episode, he is now the de-facto leader of his peer group but doubts his ability to fulfil the role expected of him as a community visionary. The plot shows this literally when he is made to take part in the traditional portraiture session with his father. Nervous after being shown the burly images of previous chiefs-in-waiting, Hiccup is dismayed to find that he is then painted not as his small, thin, visually self-conscious self, but as tall, muscular and complete with a rather aggressive-looking smirk. The artist’s impression of him is the person that he, Hiccup (as well as the artist), feels he should be. When a treasure map falls from the inner of one of the other portraits, he leads his friends to follow it.

In another series, this may have involved team efforts resulting in mutual glory, but not here. Instead, the episode shows Hiccup at his most heroic and most morally bankrupt. Visually, this is starkest when he must retrieve a small cog (that forms part of a puzzle) from a rocky outcrop. The mission is dangerous for himself, his friend and the dragon. The camera shows how far he is deviating from the norm by focusing on his method of picking the item up. Rather than finding a hooking device from the island, for instance, Hiccup uses the simple hook with which his leg has been replaced and the shot focuses on this. In this instant, the emphasis on his disability and his bone-headed determination is fetishized above his dexterity or problem solving.

It is the first obvious example in the series of the contradictions inherent in the depiction of his disability. Hunt has discussed representations of disability according to a number of key tropes. Here, Hiccup most clearly embodies that of the “Super Cripple” as one who is heroic, but also the villain. He is determined to proceed for his own vanity and is “pitiful” as a result as his “own worst enemy”, “a burden” an “object of curiosity or violence” and as a result even “sinister or evil” (ibid.). It places the viewer in a position where it becomes difficult to judge Hiccup because he succeeds despite being immoral and thus demonstrates the fallacy of the Viking code. The viewer may applaud him for his courage and insistence on self-determination, a streak he demonstrates as he continually places his friends at risk of death until the end of the episode when the treasure is in his hands and the village admires his repainted portrait. It now shows him as he actually is—the ‘treasure’ was the other chief’s own original portrait and showed this predecessor was similarly small in stature. Through defiance,



Hiccup's overall character is about forcing others to redefine themselves in relation to him regardless of how-community focused his actions actually are.

Hiccup's altering relationship in terms of redefining norms is most clearly shown in his developing relationship with Astrid and is best understood with reference to Propp's character types. The first film actually enables Hiccup to redefine no less than Propp's concept of the Hero in a similar manner to DreamWorks' prior film, *Shrek* (Adamson and Jenson). The difference between the two is the sexualization of Hiccup as a character. In *Shrek*, the monster—an ogre—is the False Hero who begins his journey to save the princess (who, here, has martial arts skills Bruce Lee would envy) purely as a means of forcing the return of his property. In doing so, however, he gains his bride and overthrows the tyrant, becoming the Hero in the process. His reward is his acceptance within the community in a heteronormative relationship.

Hiccup, alternatively, repeatedly switches between the role of the Hero and the False Hero. At the beginning of the first film, he is an ineffective 'hero' within the narrative as he tries to comply with the community's norms by killing a dragon in the hope that it will win him a date with Astrid—not the traditional heroine, but the best fighter amongst his peer group. This role is then split in the audience's mind when Hiccup instead trains Toothless and refuses to harm the dragons in the ring to the delight of the viewer, but leading Astrid admonish him as a traitor. Hiccup is then sent on the quest to rescue the princess via the Helper—in this case by preventing harm to Astrid by leading the dragons' aerial fight against the dragon queen, but the difference at this point is the extent to which the notional Hero is defined. Hiccup only survives the battle because he is saved by Toothless. His behavioural heroism is not matched by his physical abilities and this is indeed highlighted by his traditional 'Hero' transformation—the gift of his prosthesis from the village. The appendage becomes both a mark of his valour and a means of chastisement for his stubbornness that resonates throughout the rest of the franchise through the constantly audible clicking that accompanies his movements and the fact that a number of plot segments reference his helplessness if the prosthetic is removed. The import of the prosthesis is emphasised by the fact that it was an addition to the film as it was felt that Hiccup's sacrifice was lessened without its serious impact ("Trivia"). Thus, while the prosthesis becomes a part of his self-fashioning, it will always recall his lack of traditionally male heroic physicality. It will always emphasise his lack.

This becomes important in the final sequence of the first film. After his reintroduction to Berkian society following the discovery of his disability, Astrid publicly kisses him. It is not simply the case that he has got the girl, however, for Astrid is very much the instigator and grabs him towards her. Hiccup is noticeably shocked. He has become the Hero because of his False Heroic qualities and the reference to his physical lack is instead incorporated into his relationships. Astrid sees him as a suitable suitor partly because of his lack and maintains her aggression accordingly. Throughout the franchise their relationship remains, but it is a deviation from the traditional narrative; Hiccup is seen as attractive but is

not expected to give up his transgender—or transmasculine selfhood. Astrid does become his girlfriend and they kiss in the second film but Hiccup never does comply with the expectations of settled, traditional heteronormativity—he's too busy going on 'buddy' adventures with Toothless.

As this paper has demonstrated, Halberstam's observation of a queer subtext in the relationship between the characters of Hiccup and Toothless in the *How to Train Your Dragon* franchise can be seen to problematise and disrupt traditional hegemonies to pave the way for new forms of identification and community support of these. They demonstrate that alternatives to the cisgender binary can work for the benefit of the community. The problem with this approach, as demonstrated with reference to Freudian analysis, is that such readings can reflect far more about reader's own subjectivity. This matters in the context of this franchise as queered readings of the text are inherently part of the narrative that has been discussed in the public sphere by director Dean DeBlois himself. Unfortunately, Halberstam's analysis focuses on an incomplete reading of the text that does not consider the film's actual ending. He does not consider the impact of Hiccup's professed sexuo-romantic attachment for Astrid. As a result, Hiccup is seen as transspecies queered as opposed to transgender, genderqueer or even culturally queered. It is these final two types of queering as demonstrated by his self-fashioning and actions, that finally mark him out as the hero of the series. It is his development against all grains expected of him that make him a queer leader and ensure that the franchise is a Portrait of Hiccup as an Artist of his own life.

Of course, there is an elephant in the room. This paper bases its arguments largely on queer theory. As has been discussed, this is a body of work heavily influenced by advocacy and activism, as is my own. To ignore the genesis of this paper would at best be rather short sighted, as worst intellectually dishonest. It is my opinion that all frames of study are essentially subjective—we write about the things we want to see or that we want to see changed. Hiccup has been a breath of fresh air as, while he appears to deconstruct all of the hegemonies that the humanities tells us we are to stand against, the very plot of this mainstream children's film encourages individualism and accountability through its diversity. It preaches the need to think for oneself and accept that we will make mistakes rather convince ourselves that it is possible to be philosophically perfect in every way. It also emphasises the notion that making mistakes does not necessarily detract from being a good community leader. Our ideas will change over time. *How to Train Your Dragon's* message is no Hiccup—it's life.

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**Dr Charlie Oughton** is a Lecturer in Media Communications at Regent's University London and an Associate Lecturer at The University of the Arts London and ACCENT London (for the University of Southern California). He holds a PhD in Drama from The University of Hull. He has taught media and cultural studies since completing his PhD and is also a film journalist. His latest publications include chapters on cult film and the role of women in film. His areas of interest include the cultural consumption of taboo with a focus on horror films and real crime narratives.

Email ID: [charlie1oughton@gmail.com](mailto:charlie1oughton@gmail.com)

**“Captain of the Innuendo Squad”: Captain Jack Harkness’ Sexuality, Addressing Homosocial Bonding, and Plot Use of Queer Characters in *Doctor Who***

Sarah Beth Gilbert, B.A., Georgia College (2016), Independent Scholar

The new *Doctor Who*, rebooted in 2005, has made many changes to the set up of the show while keeping the basic plot: a time traveler, his companions, and their adventures. Due to being the longest running show in history, *Doctor Who* has had to rebrand and rethink the method it tells stories, and the way those stories come across to the viewers. Specifically, since the reboot, there has been a focus on representing female and queer companions in a positive light in order to reflect growing social and cultural movements. Iain MacRury and Michael Rustin write in the introduction to their book *The Inner World of Doctor Who* that the fan base of the show has grown “not by [Davies] regarding it as an undifferentiated ‘mass,’ assumed to have particular attributes or interests or in danger of being driven away by too much reality, but rather by an inclusive and imaginative approach to the many lines of difference which now characterise British society” (xxi). I will argue that the reboot of *Doctor Who* uses Captain Jack’s omnisexuality to work with his role in the show’s plot development, specifically with Mickey, Rose, and Martha, to comment positively on homosocial bonding and the importance of having non-heterosexual characters.

Captain Jack Harkness appears in Seasons 1-4 of the new *Doctor Who*, as the first omnisexual character in the series’ history. Culturally, in both American and British television, comedy is often used to pad homosexual characters’ introductions to dispel any negative thoughts that might arise from the viewers’ implicit bias. Rather than subtly write Jack’s character to be ‘normal’ and then later call attention to his sexuality, Davies does not attempt to hide it as he writes Jack’s sexuality into the very first scene we meet him. While looking at Rose through binoculars and talking to fellow soldier, Algy, Captain Jack comments:

CAPTAIN JACK. Excellent bottom.

ALGY. I say, old man. There’s a time and a place. Look, you should really be off.

CAPTIAN JACK. Sorry, old man. I’ve got to go meet a girl. But you’ve got an excellent bottom too. (“The Empty Child”)

Jack then proceeds to slap the soldier’s butt and walks off smirking. This is allows Davies’ to address sexuality precisely because if Jack’s sexuality had been brought up after the audience had begun to like him, they would feel the need to reevaluate their feelings towards his character. However, by addressing it at the start, the audience is forced to acknowledge his sexuality while watching and getting to know his personality at the same time. Kevin S. Decker asserts in his article “The Ethics of the Last of the Time Lords,” that the new focus forces “the audience of *Doctor Who* to have to look carefully at a character or a race, to be willing to revise our judgments about them [thinking] (‘Captain Jack is

bisexual—am I okay with that? He *is* very witty and clever...’)” (137). This subtle initial confrontation with a different type of sexuality is what helps Jack’s character to be used in a positive manner.

Davies does this specifically, in the first season, by exemplifying homosocial bonding through Jack’s relationship with Mickey. Mickey is Rose’s boyfriend from Earth who eventually ends up travelling with the Doctor, Jack, and Rose. While most of the plot around Mickey focuses on his relationship with Rose, his interactions with Jack are very important to observe in understanding the underlying commentary. It takes Mickey a longer amount of time to accept Jack’s sexuality but he does eventually come to terms with it. This slow acceptance of Jack, in contrast to the Doctor’s immediate positive reaction to Jack’s sexuality, permits the show to incorporate the multiple types of reactions that men have towards non-heterosexual men. The Doctor’s more open-minded reaction to Jack’s sexuality insinuates he thinks differently from the society around him, represented in the Doctor being an actual alien in a world of humans. In contrast, being from Earth, Mickey’s slower acceptance of Jack represents humanity’s less open-minded opinion and a more conservative mindset which can accept differences with time.

In her book, *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick discusses the characteristics of homosocial bonding as she argues that male-male bonding related to any type of activity is intensely characterized by deep homophobic relations, being intrinsically related to class and gender systems. This can be seen through the pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, and even rivalry that coincides with the male necessity to preserve the “diacritical opposition between ‘homosocial’ and ‘homosexual’” (Sedgwick 2). The necessity to keep this dichotomy of separation between sexually driven male-male relationships and non-sexual ones, is deeply ingrained in the way men in our culture bond, precisely because of the patriarchal society that they live in. This phenomenon is so ingrained in our society that it is represented in the vast majority of film and television.

The need for a distinct separation is shown in *Doctor Who* through Mickey’s reaction to Jack’s sexuality. Mickey is, at the time, Rose’s boyfriend who stays on Earth while she is whisked away by the Doctor. Mickey eventually gets to time-travel and meets Jack. Immediately Mickey responds negatively to Jack, in the episode “Boom Town” after Jack makes a sexual joke. Jack, the Doctor, Rose, and Mickey walk out of the TARDIS and Jack jokes:

CAPTAIN JACK. People are probably wondering what four people could do inside a small box.

MICKEY. What are you captain of? The innuendo squad? (“Boom Town”)

Jack then proceeds to give Mickey a hand sign that indicates ‘whatever’ and a mocking face before walking off.

Although the encounter is brief, Mickey is obviously repulsed as his reaction is a straightforward representation of the need to distinguish between homosocial and homosexual. Jack’s comment about four people in a box was merely a joke and not an attempt to come on to Mickey, as it was simply a

homosexual remark made in a homosocial moment with no distinction between the two. However, Mickey's uncomfortable feelings towards Jack come from his need for the dichotomy, which is tied to his desire to reinforce the male kinship system that he has learned to operate in.

More than just disregarding Mickey's set dichotomies, Jack's breaking of the patriarchal system is a direct threat for Rose's affections. Jack disrupts Mickey's gender superiority to Rose by being sexually attracted to both of them. This breaks the inequality of power between men and women precisely because Jack desires relationships with men as well. This means that in any relationship with Jack, both Mickey and Rose would be equal since Jack's omnisexuality disrupts the gender binary. Mickey's aversion to this is deeply tied to his inability to imagine, or even comprehend, a non-heterosexual relationship or friendship in the male kinship system that he is so accustomed to.

Notably, once Mickey has travelled in space with the Doctor and experienced different cultures he has no problem with Jack and greets him as an old friend. Almost three seasons later, in the episode "Journey's End," Jack and Mickey run into each other as they embrace and fight the episode's enemy together. While hugging they grin and joke:

CAPTAIN JACK. Just my luck, I climb through two miles of ventilation shafts...and who do I find?  
Mickey Mouse. Boy, is this a bad day.

MICKEY. You can talk, Captain cheesecake!

CAPTAIN JACK. Good to see ya. That's beefcake.

MICKEY. Yeah, and that's enough hugging. ("Journey's End")

During this exchange, Mickey is not disgusted by the actual joke about Jack's sexuality, rather he is made uncomfortable by the physical and sexual aspect of the hug. It is also significant that Mickey is the one that started joking about Jack's sexuality by calling him cheesecake and continues to fight the enemy with Jack as a friend without needing to clarify that their homosocial bonding is not homosexual. It is also important to note that Mickey has already lost Rose and moved on from the end of their relationship at this point, so he no longer feels the need to fight for dominance in his relationships. Mickey now can openly accept Jack as a friend without needing to define that they are solely homosocially bonding and equal.

In addition to allowing Jack's sexuality to work with the personalities of other male characters his omnisexuality also plays a big role in the plot development and relationship between the Doctor and his companions, notably Rose and Martha. When tracing the importance of Jack's presence on the show to the characters around him, Judith Halberstam's article "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" helps to explain and outline the pattern of the homosocial triangle and how Jack fits into it.

In the article, Halberstam evaluates the role that most gay or lesbian characters play in films in the late 1990s. She argues that these 'heterosexual conversion fantasies' ultimately use the homosexual character

to the advantages of the other heterosexual characters. These triangles are typically made up of two men and a woman, in which she claims the plot puts “an overtly gay man or a lesbian in the position of rival for the woman’s affection” (Halberstam 346). This creates a rivalry between the two men for the woman’s affection as the heterosexual man is sexually able, and the homosexual man is emotionally able, in relation to the woman’s ideal happiness. Halberstam states that the effect of this ends up being a “decidedly conservative narrative that props up hetero-masculinity as good masculinity and casts both the gay man and the lesbian as bad substitutes” (Halberstam 346). These plots seem to help the GLBTQ community but really just reinforce the heterosexist agenda.

The triangle relationship of the Doctor, Rose, and Captain Jack indeed places Jack in the position for the rivalry of Rose’s affection from the moment that they meet. MacRury and Rustin describe this first encounter, arguably like most of Jack’s encounters, as “an explicitly sexual one” (MacRury and Rustin 47). In the episode “The Empty Child” Rose is hanging over the middle of the Blitz in London by a rope and begins to slip and fall until she falls, quite literally, into Captain Jack’s arms. On top of Jack’s ship in front of Big Ben, Rose and Jack continue to flirt and get to know each other as Jack quickly fills the lack of emotional satisfaction that the Doctor has refused Rose. The addition of Jack to the dynamic immediately presents Rose with another option in her quest for an emotional counterpart. MacRury and Rustin observe that “Rose enacts her disappointment with the Doctor as a possible sexual partner through her flirtations with Captain Jack” (29). This deduction is spot on due to the fact that Rose’s desire for the Doctor to reciprocate her emotional feelings is a theme that has run through the first two series of the new *Doctor Who*.

Their first encounter also serves to introduce that Jack, the gay (omnisexual) man, seems to be a better match for Rose than the Doctor, the hetero-normative masculine male. Jack’s character holds true to Halberstam’s theory that the gay man “play(s) the sensitive but masculine guy; who is a gay man who can pass for straight” (347). Jack fits this mold *even better* because of his omnisexuality. Where Halberstam says the gay man of the triangle normally falls short in sexually desiring the women, Jack’s omnisexuality allows him to actually desire Rose and therefore become a real contender for Rose in everyway that the Doctor is. This makes the triangle more intense than the ones Halberstam studied because Jack is propped up as a viable candidate, which creates a real threat.

Halberstam argues that by the end of the narrative the gay man has rejected the woman and, after this rejection, the woman accepts the hetero-normative alpha male back into her life because he has reformed by observing the homosexual man. The narrative of *Doctor Who* follows this as the Doctor does, in fact, become more sensitive and understanding towards Rose’s feelings after they have both spent time with Jack. The Doctor takes cues from Jack as to what Rose likes and does not like, for example when he ends up dancing with Rose at the end of “The Doctor Dances.” Yet the Doctor’s new reform happens at the expense of Jack, who is expelled from the narrative at this point because he



is no longer needed to help. Here the hetero-normative man banishes the homosexual man to get him out of the picture which is a death in it's own right.

We later find out that after being brought back to life by Rose, Jack was dropped off and abandoned on some random planet by the Doctor. We are told a few seasons later that the reason the Doctor leaves Jack is not because of the sexual rivalry for Rose but because of his new immortality. While the Doctor's expulsion of Jack may be validated by his aversion to a mistake of immortality, the eviction still allows the Doctor to take the reforms he has gained from being around Jack in order to further his relationship with Rose at Jack's expense. This is the same malicious removal that Halberstam traces through the narratives, only made different by an additional reason for expulsion.

After Rose and the Doctor are split apart, the Doctor goes on quickly to find another companion because he doesn't want to be alone. The companion he meets is Martha Jones, a medical student, studying to be a doctor who teams up with the Doctor to save the day. While most of her story line in *Doctor Who* revolves around her longing for the Doctor, who is still in love with Rose, she provides remarkable differences in the story line than Rose which come, most notably, in her relationship with Captain Jack.

When applying Judith Halberstam's "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" to the Martha, Jack, and Doctor triangle dynamic, one finds a decidedly different narrative for Martha, the heterosexual woman, and Jack, the omnisexual man than the one we saw in Series One. As Martha questions the Doctor's feelings for her, Jack comes into the narrative to play the role Halberstam outlined as "the sensitive but masculine guy" (347) that Martha needs. After traveling through space, the Doctor and Martha run out of the TARDIS and see Jack laying on the ground passed out. Martha then tries to give him CPR thinking that he is dead until he gasps and comes back to life:

MARTHA. It's alright, just breathe deep. I've got you now.

CAPTAIN JACK. Captain Jack Harkness. And who are you?

MARTHA. Martha Jones.

CAPTAIN JACK. Nice to meet you, Martha Jones. ("Utopia")

Here Jack literally wakes up in Martha's arms at the exact moment when she needs someone to recognize her for her potential, exactly what the gay male does in Halberstam's love triangle.

However more than just flirt with her and provide a relationship alternative, Jack is now used to help Martha see the Doctor's inability to love her and to help her realize that the Doctor does this to other people as well. Jack arguably was in a similar position between Rose and the Doctor as Martha is in her position between the Doctor and the absence of Rose. As Jack begins to tell his story about how the Doctor abandoned him at the end of Series One, Martha starts to see that she is not the only one treated badly by the Doctor:

MARTHA. Is that what happens though? Seriously? Do you just get bored with us one day and disappear?

CAPTAIN JACK. Not if you're blonde.

MARTHA. Oh, she was blonde? Oh what a surprise! ("Utopia")

Immediately Jack and Martha bond over their inferiority to Rose in the Doctor's mind, which only strengthens Halbertam's argument about the ability of the gay man to relate to the heterosexual female in question. As Lynette Porter states, Jack can understand Martha's feelings and situation "also suffering presumably (at least on screen) unrequited love for the Doctor" (255). Although Jack and Martha do not have any sexual encounters or kiss in *Doctor Who*, they both are emotionally supportive and provide companionship while they try to figure out their relationship with the Doctor. In many ways this is exactly how Halberstam states that "the gay man ultimately offers perfect companionship for the heterosexual woman by being willing to do everything the 'Martian' will not do" (347).

The end of the Jack, Martha, and the Doctor narrative is different than the earlier Jack, Rose, and Doctor narrative. Arguably Jack is the reason that Martha is able to see that the Doctor will never be able to give her what she wants, which allows her to leave him and the TARDIS of her own accord. In the episode "Last of the Time Lords" she explains that she now realizes her worth:

MARTHA. [My friend] wasted years pining after [this guy], years of her life because while he was around she never looked at anyone else. I told her, I always said to her time and time again: get out. So this is me, getting out ("Last of the Time Lords").

Martha leaving fits the second of the two possible endings that Halberstam predicts, aligning with the one in which the female "mov[es] on from both the straight man and the gay substitute to a more realistic object of affection, one who, unlike the gay man may want to have sex with her every now and then, and, unlike the bullying straight man, treats her with some respect" (348). Also in this triangle, Jack decides to stay in London to help his people at Torchwood with the knowledge that he has gained from time travel and his immortality. This time, the gay man is allowed to choose his ending and is not expelled from the narrative. This is important because the writers use the omnisexual GLBTQ character in a positive way to help better the lives of those around him rather than him being used to help the two heterosexual characters end up together.

In addition to this, according to Halberstam, a problem with the normal heterosexual conversion fantasy is that it would find the "heterosexual white male masculinity [to] appear as naturally attractive and desirable despite any socially repulsive behaviors that may accompany it" (348). This does not hold true for the narrative with Martha and Jack precisely because the Doctor's inability to acknowledge their emotions is what causes them to depart, leaving the Doctor by himself again. Rather than getting the girl like the movies Halberstam based her theory off of, the Doctor does not win the girl and is left sad

and alone. Here we see the narrative hold Martha and Jack's independence in a positive light and the Doctor's Alpha heteronormative behavior in a negative one.

Furthermore, Martha and Jack leaving the Doctor suggests that they both break free from the narrative that uses Queer and female characters for the heterosexual male's story line. By writing Martha and Jack choosing to leave the Doctor, in their best interests, Davies represents non-heteronormative male characters being independent and calling the shots. Through Martha and Jack, he constructs story lines for viewers to consume that show minority characters having agency over their actions. A type of story line which subverts the dominant narrative and troubling identities of minority characters found on television.

In conclusion, by addressing sexuality in a positive manner on television, sometimes smaller steps like this are more effective when introducing less popular opinions on the topic. The only problem however, is when these non-hetero-normative characters are not given equal character development and are just used to further the heterosexual characters' plot points and developments. While the presence of Jack and his sexuality is a great step forward, the way his story and plot line is treated is not. Thankfully, this is addressed and changed in a similar dynamic between the Doctor, Jack, and Martha that presents itself later in the show. A dynamic which is used to show the strength and agency that gay characters can have as Jack, ultimately, helps Martha and himself realize their true worth and take their lives into their own hands.

The importance of narratives like this undoubtedly have cultural weight as we are living in an era with such contrasting steps of the GLBTQ community both forward and back. Queer people are allowed to get married in all 50 states and yet we have a president who Tweets promises to take away the rights of Trans people to serve in the military. Although the Davies' era of *Doctor Who* was in the early 2000's, these exact story lines with Jack paved the way for Steven Moffat, head show writer in 2017, to cast an openly gay black female lead, Pearl Mackie, to play an openly gay companion, Bill Potts. If it was not for Davies' use of Jack as a Queer character, the possibility to have a lesbian black female companion make witty jokes about racism, sexism, and homophobia during a highly-politicized time like 2017 would be impossible. The cultural practice of watching television is important to cultural studies in order to assess and evaluate on screen representation. As the world changes, the identities shown on television change to represent the many identities found in society. Thus if society continues to consume television as a form of mass media, the identities and representation of society in shows will remain relevant to cultural studies.

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**Sarah Beth Gilbert** graduated with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Georgia College & State University in 2016 and is a current AmeriCorps Member finishing her first year serving in Newark, New Jersey as a High School Teaching Assistant and English Tutor at Great Oaks High. She has been accepted to Villanova and Georgetown's Literature MA programs and has deferred admission for another year in order to serve one more year at Great Oaks with AmeriCorps during the 2017-2018 school year. Sarah Beth has been published in *The Corinthian*, Georgia College's Academic Journal, and presented at multiple conferences including the Mid-Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association conference in 2016. Her areas of interest include Gender and Sexuality Studies, Feminist and Queer Theory, Film Theory, and Psychoanalytic Theory.

Email ID: sarah.gilbert417@gmail.com