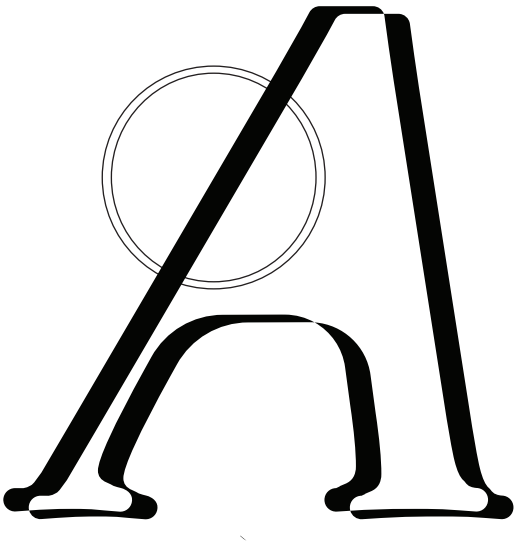
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Introduction

the editors: YEBO CHIPOFYA
and LILIANA WEHR

The idea for *Agora* came from that place on Trinity grounds which provides the most fertile ground for great ideas: the Postgraduate 1937 Reading Room basement. It was here in the kitchenette, among beeping microwaves and sterile white walls that we first dreamed of a better future; a future in which the great ideas of Trinity's postgraduates go beyond the confinements of the octagonal room. The typical structures of universities—divided into faculties, schools, departments—do not inspire interdisciplinary exchange, instead running the risk of forming islands of knowledge. The Postgraduate Reading Room is one of the few spaces on Campus that completely does away with these borders, offering a space for exchange, enhanced by the soft smell of garlic. However, calling our magazine 'The Postgraduate Reading Room Basement Kitchenette' seemed a bit clunky. Instead, we turned towards the ancient Greek for a shorter term: the Agora—a public space where people of different backgrounds gathered to exchange knowledge and ideas. Our mission is to bring this spirit into print: We want to foster exchange across all disciplines as well as endow postgraduate students with valuable insight into publishing critical essays. Hopefully, *Agora Vol. I.I* can serve as an example of this mission. We feel fortunate to publish a diverse collection of essays from all kinds of disciplines, each exploring a unique subject matter. At this point, we would like to thank everyone who submitted their work as well as the Trinity professors who offered valuable insight into the position of AI in higher education. Our first issue would not have been possible without these contributions.

In her analysis of the Greek Agora, Samantha Martin-McAuliffe claims that "we should perceive and imagine the Agora as a place thick with diverse conversation, glances, and movement."[1] We hope this first issue and those to come are just as 'thick', filled with ideas that are bound together by their curiosity and dedication to inquiry.

The Ecstacy of Saint Anne:

Dance-Cults, Lady Mystics, and the Love Ethic in Mona Fastvold's *The Testament of Ann Lee* (2025)

DELANEY TEEHAN

M.Phil. in Modern and Contemporary Literary Studies

INT: Manchester – a townhouse, 1758. A crowd gathers in a wood-panelled drawing room. A female minister scans her congregants. "Christ's spirit first appeared in a man, Jesus," she intones, "but will eventually reappear, to fulfil the promise of the second coming, in the form of a woman. As we were all created in his likeness, God must be both male and female." Her eyes train on a young woman who returns her gaze, awed. An absent voice narrates: "Ann Lee had at last discovered a community that espoused her beliefs, and she, in turn, embraced their principles wholeheartedly." Lee serves as the subject of Mona Fastvold's 2025 biopic musical *The Testament of Ann Lee*, which portrays her ascendancy to figurehead of the Shaker Christian sect.[1] Through her portrait of Lee, Fastvold probes questions integral to contemporary conceptions of Christianity. How should one consider Christ's corporeal form? What from His example are individuals truly capable of embodying on earth? And if humans are all created Imago *Dei*, what about the Feminine is inherently divine?

The Shaker movement was founded in 1747 by English ministers Jane and James Wardley after breaking off from the earlier Quaker sect. They were radical by contemporary standards, with egalitarianism, pacificism, gender equality, and a communal utopianism as their guiding principles, but are better known for their eccentric traits, including mandated universal celibacy and ecstatic worship involving convulsive movement. As a young woman, Ann Lee experienced a series of divine revelations and consequently professed to be the Second Coming of Christ.[2] After establishing a fellowship in Manchester, the Shakers emigrated and formed a utopian commune in present-day upstate New York where they practised mindful living, making lasting innovations in architecture, hand-tool technology, and the crafting of furniture.[3] *Ann Lee* is Fastvold's third feature,

following *The Sleepwalker* (2014) and *The World to Come* (2018). The film was cowritten by her partner Brady Corbet and the pair also collaborated on Corbet's films *The Childhood of a Leader* (2015), *Vox Lux* (2018), and 2025's critical standout *The Brutalist*. Fastvold and Corbet have become known for their immense-scale projects produced independently on tight budgets (both *The Brutalist* and *Ann Lee* were budgeted at only $10,000,000). For a period film set in multiple countries replete with extended song and dance sequences, Ann Lee's grand scale mirrors the ambitions of its subject.

Fastvold's film opens with Lee's childhood in Manchester–she was the second oldest of eight children born to an impoverished blacksmith and was baptised Anglican as a child. Ann (played by Amanda Seyfried) attends a Shaker revival meeting led by the Wardleys early in the film. The ministers invite congregant James Whittaker to deliver his "unflinching testimony," and he admits his ungodly sexual proclivities. An older woman intonates a steady drone while the congregation begin a rhythmic chant. Whittaker moves to their rhythm, excising his sin physically. Dance serves bifurcated purposes in *Ann Lee*–it expresses sin, then absolves it. Fastvold hard-cuts from this sequence months ahead. Ann is now fully embedded in the Shaker community, dancing and singing ecstatically to composer Daniel Blumberg's "Worship." Choreographer Celia Rowlson-Hall creates dichotomous physical languages in *Ann Lee,* differentiating diegetic movement from choreography. The exorcistic movement of Whittaker's testimony contrasts sharply with the joyous (dare we say, orgiastic?) movement of the first worship sequence. Dance tells the Life Story in *Ann Lee*–Rowlson-Hall's diegetic movement demonstrates its isolation and sorrow, its awkward interstices; her choreography, its rapture, its jubilation–the joy of communal sublimation. The camera sweeps languorously through the worship sequences, mirroring the interpersonal rapture of religious devotion. Says cinematographer William Rexer, "our guiding principle was that the camera should behave as one of the Shaker religion's believers."[4]

Ann Lee borrows from a long tradition of dance-cult films, but Fastvold's melding of camera and choreography is most reminiscent of Dario Argento's 1977 horror masterpiece *Suspira*. In Argento's film, Jessica Harper plays Suzy, an American ballet dancer tormented by supernatural phenomena as she begins her training at the prestigious Tanz Akademie in Freiburg, West Germany. In one scene, Suzy arrives to class in a state of disarray and asks to be dismissed, but head instructor Miss Tanner (Alida Valli) forces Suzy to perform her assigned combination. Cinematographer Luciano Tovoli's camera tracks Suzy as she flails

across the floor and collapses. Choreography in Argento's film functions as a *lingua franca* for the characters and audience. Harper's performance and Tovoli's filmic choreography–panning anamorphic lens, dizzying tracking shots of dancers in motion, and hyper-saturated color–portray the academy's pervasive aura of dread. As in Fastvold's film, movement, and spirituality are inextricably linked. Suzy uncovers a coven embedded within the school and is pursued by witches in a final chase, mirroring the horrifying frenzy of the earlier dance sequences. In *Suspiria*, the lithe, angular bodies of the dancers, the energy expressed in their torque and thrust, become corporeal representatives for the nebulous cult.

Suspiria dichotomises the coven and Suzy, the audience's surrogate, peering in from the outside with curiosity and dread. In Fastvold's film, the Shakers seduce Lee by offering her sublimation within a dynamic community. This modality iterates on the poetics of magnetism featured in Franco-Argentine director Gaspar Noé's recent dance-cult classic, *Climax* (2018).[7] Noé's film showcases a dance troupe unwittingly drugged on the night of their final dress rehearsal with an unnamed hallucinogen. *Climax* opens with a movement sequence combining ballroom, breaking, waacking, contortion, and rhythmic gymnastics, with each dancer elaborating on the previous's gestures. The camera's movement evolves with the propulsive energy of the sequence, starting static then cresting overhead as the energetic performance turns Bacchic. The genius of Noé's film rests in its articulation of the mesmeric euphoria of movement before we become aware that the dancers have been drugged. We are transfixed first by the exultations of the dancers' bodies and their iterative physical dialogue, and begin to question which produces the film's psychotropic effects–the narcotics or the dancers' Hydra-esque fructuous scrum?

In his essay "Burn the Witch: Decadence and the Occult in Contemporary Feminist Performance,"[8] Adam Alston describes the dance-cult as site for feminist reclamation, using Lauren Barri Holstein's 2017 dance piece *Notorious* (a "witch-bitch" ritual) as his primary text. For Holstein's witches, the ritual of dance functions as an "act of pleasurable repulsion, of intentional delinquency, of unapologetically creating problems." The Salem Witch trials are hugely influential for both Holstein and Fastvold. In their essay: "A Feminist Theory of Witch Hunts,"[9] Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan describe the confluence of feminist assertion and accusations of witchcraft in the colonial world: "Women who were 'quarrelsome,' meaning they demanded something or refused to be silenced, were often tried as witches. Witch hunts targeted women who knew more… who



Stills from Dario Argento's Suspiria (1977)[5] *and Noe's Climax (2018).*[6]

tried to assert their voices," (Kelkar and Nathan 179). The infamous "dancing in the woods" by the young women of Salem in 1692 can be recontextualised as a collective assertion of voice; the cordoning of women in colonial America within "household or reproductive work" elicited a ritualistic movement-rebellion. Fastvold's film begins with a dance sequence set to Blumberg's titular track: "The Testament of Ann Lee" performed by Shaker women in the woods in an overt homage to the Witch Trials (which predate Lee's arrival in America by only eighty years). Lee was incarcerated for witchcraft in her lifetime, and like the women of Salem, her transposition of spirituality into ecstatic movement upended colonial gender norms.

Ann Lee follows a recent trend in Hollywood movies interested in female religious mystics. Fastvold is indebted to her Catholic confrères (Paul Verhoeven's *Benedetta* (2021) and Maggie Betts' *Novitiate* (2017)) and the A24 neo-horror consortium (Robert Eggers' *The VVitch* (2015) and Ari Aster's *Midsommar* (2019). But the sincerity of *Ann Lee* finds its most meaningful comp in Greta Gerwig's underappreciated Christian theological treatise, *Lady Bird* (2018).[10] While Gerwig's film primarily functions as a coming-of-age story, the titular Lady Bird's relationship to Catholicism is essential to her self-actualisation. In her zine, *Lady Saints & Mystics*, produced in conjunction with the release of *Lady Bird*, Gerwig writes: "Priesthood and direct communion with God is usually reserved for men. But then every so often a woman, usually a young woman hears directly from God […] she is possessed by piercing truth and awe."[11]

Lady Bird functions as a mystic in her Catholic high school. She produces bizarre dadaist election campaign posters, having become a kind of folk-hero for the school's annual student government campaigns. She operates as the collective voice for her class during an anti-abortion assembly publicly ridiculing the speaker. But her spirituality is most clearly articulated during a scene in which she reviews her college admissions essay with her principal, a nun named Sister Sarah Joan, who comments on her writerly affection for her hometown of Sacramento. Lady Bird responds: "I guess I pay attention." "Don't you think maybe they are the same thing?" Sarah Joan retorts, "Love and attention?"[12] Simone Weil served as a key inspiration for Gerwig while writing *Lady Bird*. She quotes from Weil in her zine: "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love." Weil, like Ann Lee, was "possessed by piercing truth and awe" as a young woman, experiencing visions from God calling her to the Christian. In 1942's Gravity and Grace, Weil decries pragmatism in religion: "If

we turn our mind toward the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself" (Weil 117).[13] For Weil, the threat of losing faith must be akin to losing the will to live.

Upon its release, *Ann Lee* was deconstructed extensively in critical circles. The most-discussed moment from the film has become the single-shot scene in which Lee receives her divine vocation. She has been arrested in Manchester for heresy, forgoing food and water in prison to focus her meditations. Her delirious prayerful mutterings spliced with the images of sexual ecstasy recall Bernini's 1652 altarpiece, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, whose rapturous expression at receiving the "penetrating" word of God in the form of a piercing arrow has been theorised as an orgasm of spiritual pleasure.

For Lee and Saint Teresa, prayer–private, intimate communion of body, mind, and soul–accesses the same internal longing as sexual desire. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl"[16] posits that for the characters in Austen's novels, the solitary act of reading when characters are left to "the love-drenched tableaux of [their] imagination[s]" constitutes an essential personal, creative, and often erotic space for women under otherwise constant supervision. In *Ann Lee*, prayer, like reading for Austen's heroines, allows the supplicant to "[deal] with [one's] own terror, [one's] own arousal, [one's] disavowals, in [one's] own way, on [one's] own time, in [one's] own privacy."

Rexer shoots Seyfried in this sequence through the bars of her prison cell. For Lee, as for Weil, who perished at thirty-four after restricting intake of food on the grounds of Schopenhauerian religious asceticism, the physiological subsists off the spiritual. She sings lyrics adapted from a traditional Shaker hymn—"I hunger and thirst for true righteousness."[17] Seyfried's performance of "Hunger and Thirst" portrays the personal functionality of singing. Compared to film adaptations of existing stage musicals, diegesis is the musical prerogative in *Ann Lee*. Blumberg's adapted Shaker music appears where the singing of hymns would naturally materialise–roared over the shrieks of the revival meeting, or whispered *recitativo* under one's breath during daily chores. For anyone who has spent time with young children, the style of singing in this scene will be recognisable in the kinds of songs kids invent and perform for themselves on the playground or in their bedrooms. Extemporaneous, arhythmic, performed *parlando*–they are exercises in genuflection which both self-narrate and self-narrativise.

Is that not the ultimate purpose of

prayer?

In "Burn the Witch," Alston discusses movement as a "space for fun and subversive silliness in the calling out of religious master narratives," citing Ann Liv Young's choreographic portrayals of adolescent femininity. Her piece Melissa is a bitch[18] originally performed at the ImPulsTanz festival in 2005 features two young women unenthusiastically performing simple choreography while singing R. Kelly's "Ignition-Remix." Anna Watkins Fisher characterises Young's work as "adolescent drag."[19] The performers adopt the cadence of thirteen-year-old girls in a school talent show and the juxtaposition of their self-conscious movement and gravely serious recitation of "Ignition," with the song's explicit lyrics, elucidates the explorative chaos of female adolescence. For both Young and Fastvold, song and movement function as sluices for juvenility, euphoria, sexuality, and shame–creative expression becomes an avenue for the Young Woman's *loquendum*: that which cannot be merely spoken but must somehow be expressed.

Lee is released from arrest and recounts her mystical visions to her followers. "I understood that there is one single cause for humanity's separation from God: fornication." She determines that the Shakers must lead a celibate life to fully commune with God. In an earlier sequence set to Blumberg's composition "Beautiful Treasures," Lee conceives, gives birth to, then



Still of Seyfried performing "Hunger and Thirst"[14] and Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa.[15]



mourns the deaths of four children, leaving her despondent. Her messianic calling materialises from these losses. "Is this a vision, or is this madness?" Fastvold muses in an interview with Lauren Jackson for *The New York Times*.[21] "It's up to you in which direction you want to go." Fastvold's previous films investigate the ways in which women cultivate space in hostile circumstances; her protagonist's ache for understanding in *The Sleepwalker* manifests in unconscious motility, in *The World to Come*, a farmer, also traumatised by the death of her child, finds solace in a queer relationship with a neighbour's wife. Fastvold frames Lee's abhorrence of sex as both divine veneration and a product of postnatal trauma. In an interview with Sean Fennessey for *The Big Picture*, Fastvold contends that "arguing for celibacy and the dissolving of marriages at that time… was [Lee's] only way to gain autonomy as a woman."[22] Through her rejection of sex, Lee circumvents further traumatisation by reimagining kinship structures for men and women.

Lee's coterie embrace her as a messiah and evangelise throughout Manchester. They are chastised for sacrilege by the Anglican church and immigrate to the American colonies, establishing a settlement in upstate New York. The Shakers remove themselves from mainstream colonial life, taking a position of pacifist neutrality and refusing to sign an oath of allegiance. In his 1630 lecture, "A Model of Christian Charity," Puritan John Winthrop conceptualised the American colonies as "a City upon a Hill," a

beacon of hope for the globalising post-Enlightenment world.[23] Ann Lee's Shakers reject Winthrop's exceptionalist ethos, embodying the American tenet of religious liberty not by couching their political aims in religious dogma, but utilising the *terra incognita* of the New World as a venue for experiments in the pursuit of a higher spiritual purpose. "A place for everything and everything in its place," serves as a refrain throughout the film and materialises in the Shakers' quotidian life on the Niskayuna compound. Lee and her followers expand the boundaries of their ritualistic religious practice to include the construction of communal architecture, the crafting of furniture, the cultivation of crops, and the refinement of household tools.

The focus on "craft" in the latter half of the film transposes its first act's chaotic fervour into a regimented praxis. For his interview with Fastvold for *The New Yorker*, Michael Shulman[24] joined the filmmaker and Sylvia Yount, head of the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on a tour of the museum's Shaker Retiring Room. "The Shakers improved many household devices," writes Shulman. "These tools, Yount said, reduced labor for women: 'This was about gender equality.'" Ann Lee's utopia is predicated on novel relations between men, women, labour, and leisure. With the expulsion of sex and marriage, the feminised labour of childrearing and housekeeping is redistributed between men and women, as is the masculinised labour of farming and woodworking (in one sequence, Seyfried planes planks of wood to form chairlegs and chiselling joins for cabinetry). Men and women view each other not as possessable objects or inconceivably alien entities, but horizontally–as peers, collaborators, spiritual interlocutors.

Fastvold's film concludes with the death of "Mother Ann," as she became known by her followers at the age of forty-eight on the Niskayuna compound. The Shakers hold a service in celebration of her life, featuring a final dance sequence set to a reprise of "Beautiful Treasures." Rowlson-Hall's concentric circles, rhythmic stepping, and synchronised gestures demonstrates the film's sober evolution. Fastvold's elegy for Lee recasts the notions of "Great Man" history afforded to other Great Awakening evangelists (Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, George Whitefield). If Edwards' 1741 sermon: "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"[25] exemplifies the "fire and brimstone" evangelistic strategy ubiquitous in the colonial Americas, Fastvold portrays Lee's evangelism as its collaborative, humanistic foil.

"When I began to research her, I had moments where I thought 'when am I going to think–what a charlatan?,'" says Fastvold in her interview with Fennessey, "[but]



Still from the 2005 ImPulsTanz production of Melissa is a bitch.20

she led from this place of love… it was never about ego, it was always just about trying to create a safe space where people could worship in a different way." It is easy to deride both Lee and Fastvold's film as ridiculous; it is harder, and more rewarding, to absorb their ideas earnestly. Lee considered herself Christ's Second Advent, and their most striking commonality was unrelenting compassion. Her leadership established the Shaker sect as a bastion for abolitionism, pacifism, universal literacy, gender equity, and the dismantling of class in post-Revolutionary War America. Lee's embodiment of the Christ figure in Fastvold's film exemplifies not only the essentiality of the "feminine" traits of tenderness, nurturing, and conviviality to divinity, but the ability of the *Imago Dei* to reflect universally through the act of community-building. Fastvold's film affirms that through Mother Ann's testament, "there is no Gentile or Jew… barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:10-11).

Tsavo's Human-Eating Lions:

An Interspecies History

KEIR CHAUHAN

M.Phil. in Environmental History

Over 10 months in 1898, two Tsavo lions (*Panthera leo*) stalked, preyed, and allegedly killed anywhere between thirty and a hundred people, mainly Indian indentured labourers (unskilled workers forced into coercive labour contracts) working on a railway line between Mombasa and Uganda.[1] The lions' assertion of their agency impeded the railway's development as they unintentionally precipitated a mass desertion of labourers.[2] In turn, the disruption threatened British Railway Imperialism, which relied on railways to reorder East African space to meet the socio-economic and political needs of the British Empire.3

The episode concluded with the deaths of the two Tsavo lions at the hands of the engineer/railway overseer, Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson, who later narrativized the incident in his autobiographical account "The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures".[4] This dominant account emphasised Patterson's Kenyan hunting exploits, his fraught relationship with indentured labourers, and the ecological transformation of the wider landscape. As a colonial hunter narrative, it shaped the perception and ideology of the British Imperial project by playing on fears and fantasies that pitted an imperial civilising mission against primitive beasts that had to be overcome.[5]

Over the last hundred years, the attacks have grown in cultural prominence due to Patterson's narrativizations and two Hollywood adaptations, Bwana Devil (1953) and The Ghost and the Darkness (1997).[6] However, there has been limited historical analysis of the "man-eating" lions and what they reveal about human-animal relations and British Imperialism in East Africa.[7] A critical reading of Patterson's dominant accounts of the episode allows one to contextualise the incident and disentangle ideas of distributed agency and resistance, and in the process bring the perspectives and

actions of the labourers and lions into focus.

This essay draws from environmental and animal histories to integrate the actions of the two Tsavo lions, their wider regional ecological context, and their victims (the labourers) into historical accounts of British Railway Imperialism in East Africa.[8] By writing animal-sensitive histories of non-human species, historians of animals deploy an approach that recognises the agency of all actors in shaping histories.[9] Rather than conflating agency with matters of attribution and intention, animal-sensitive historians have shown how entities are relationally linked in shared networks of agency, an approach known as Actor-Network Theory.[10] These networks are explored by the South Asian historian Jonathan Saha, who highlights how British Imperialism was interspecies by nature because it relied on human-animal relationships that led to the transformation, control, and exploitation of colonized environments.[11] This methodological approach facilitates discussion of human-animal relationships as interspecies, avoiding hierarchical and homogenous descriptions of "the humans" (*Homo sapiens*) and "other" animals.[12] Applied to the incident in Tsavo, it makes apparent the distinction between the experiences and actions of labourers, the lions, and an agent of the British Empire, Patterson. This distinction is important because it highlights how human differentiation (racialised labour practices) and species difference (humans and lions) materially shaped British Imperialism.[13]

Importantly, the lions' attacks and subsequent disruptions to the railway have no single scientifically attributable cause. However, a networked agency approach informed by scientific research from the Chicago Field Museum can help to contextualise the lion attacks. For instance, Patterson's 1907 account references "28" labourer deaths, with the African death toll impossible to verify due to there being "no official record".[14] In Patterson's updated but abridged 1925 Field Museum account, he estimates the death toll to be 135 Indian and African labourers.[15] However, assessments of hair and bone collagen from the lions' skulls suggest the death toll is closer to around 35 people, making up 30% of one lion's diet and 13% of the other.[16] While the lions preyed on 22 different species, the differentiation in the two lions' prey is likely a reflection of a severe dental abscess found on one of the lions.[17] Analysis suggests that the two lions were brothers in a hunting coalition that, due to dental injury and a rinderpest outbreak, faced reduced prey opportunities.[18] Consequently, the lions, particularly the injured lion, supplemented their usual prey by hunting poorly protected labourers on a historic route characterised by violent interspecies interactions

and conditions suitable for ambush attacks.

The conditions for the lion attacks demonstrate how the environmental historian William Cronon's theory of culturally and historically constructed "wilderness" interacts with East African British Imperialism.[19] The lions force historians to explore interconnected ecologies despite the significance of abstraction in British Imperialism, which rendered "other" species and environments "very far away from civilisation" into the historical background.[20] Drawing from scientific research, exploration of Tsavo's natural history highlights the role of historic routes and imperial resource extraction in creating the opportunistic conditions for lion attacks.[21] Studies of lion attacks within Tsavo suggest that, as a scavenging predator, the lions would have developed a distinct prey preference for hunting humans across generations.[22] Scientists theorize that this was a consequence of exposure to the dead and the dying enslaved humans transported on a Swahili caravan slave trade route through Tsavo, which by 1891 had become an ivory trade artery that the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, hoped to disrupt by routing a railway on it.[23] This decision links the British Empire's slave trade legacy with its practices of imperial extraction and spatial control, all of which reshaped Tsavo's ecology.
Imperial extraction in the form of the ivory trade would also reshape Tsavo's ecology. The exploitation of elephants (Loxodonta africana) led to a refiguring of Tsavo ecology so that by the 1890s it was characterised by impenetrable undergrowth.[24] Reducing the habitat for grazing ungulates, the exploitation of elephants for ivory would, by extension, lead to a reduction in the prey favoured by lions and further encourage ambush predation tactics characteristic of Tsavo lion attacks.[25] In Patterson's account, this reality extended the lions' ability to make the "hunter [become] the hunted" as it was difficult to shoot the lions in a "thick jungle" that gave "the hunted animal…every chance against the hunter."[26]

As an interspecies encounter, the lion attacks reaffirm humanity's nature as an animal that can be preyed upon. By challenging the conceptual hierarchy of human exceptionalism through the "ultimate rebellion" of "eating human flesh," the Tsavo lions represented a direct challenge to perceived power dynamics of who was hunter and who was prey.[28] Capturing the cultural imagination of the British Empire, the lions confronted the violent intimacies of Patterson's own animal nature, revealing the limits of what environmental historian Brett L. Walker calls biological transcendence, a cultural artifice that supports humanity's separation from the animal world.[29] The lions captured the cultural imagination of the British Empire by differentiating



"Heads of Eight Lions Shot by the Author" by J. H. Patterson[27]

themselves, playing into colonial fears about man-eating monsters and fantasies about vanquishing dangerous beasts. As Patterson's lion head trophy display shows, his narrative was primarily concerned with his hunting exploits, particularly of lions, which were central to most 19th-century African hunting accounts.[30] However, Patterson's account of the "man-eating" lions goes further by making his central antagonists no longer "real animals at all, but

[instead] devils in lions' shape," in effect, monstrous symbols of primitivity.[31] As monsters, the two Tsavo lions required the virtues and skills of a "devil-killer", not just for the hunt but also to preserve British Imperial order following the disruption of the railway system.[32] The episode is indicative of the cultural dimensions of colonial hunting, as described by British historian of imperialism John M. Mackenzie, and of the connections between hunting cultures and colonialism.[33]

Patterson's interspecies dynamic is not only notable in its depiction of Patterson as a monster-slayer and the lions as monsters, but also in how it frames indentured labourers as helpless and largely nameless victims. Patterson disparages the "terrified" indentured labourers, whom he criticises for "never [being] remarkable for bravery".[34] Casting himself as a paternalistic figure, Patterson in his narrative alludes to the exploitative and extractive hierarchy of British Imperialism, which made some humans more readily exposed to the fate of "being flesh".[35] Violent interspecies encounters that resulted in the "crunching" of bones and the sound of "dreadful purring" were the fate of "Ungan Singh" and other physically exposed indentured labourers, but it was not the fate of Patterson.[36] At times, Patterson's narrative flirts with the dangers of his becoming a potential victim, but remains consistent in how it frames Patterson as the slayer of the lions.

Seeking to rebalance the narrative, African animal historians such as Sandra Swart have emphasized the lions' disruption of the railway as unlikely symbolic figures of resistance against British colonialism.[37] However, classifying the lions' actions as a symbolic act of resistance risks downplaying the networked agency between the lions and indentured labourers. Indentured labourers were not nameless victims, and the lions' actions were not made with the intention of disrupting the railway line; instead, they opportunistically benefited from it. Despite being placed at the margins of this interspecies encounter, it was ultimately the actions of the Indian indentured labourers whose physical exposure led to the act of mass desertion that closed the railway line. In contrast, the lions were taking advantage of the labourers, an exposed food source working under poor conditions that made them vulnerable to a litany of diseases and increased encounters with predator species.[38] This distinction is important for understanding the nuances of how the railway became closed, and the relationship between the British Empire, labourers, and the lions.

As an interspecies encounter, the lions' attacks on labourers became the catalyst rather than the sole cause for desertion, a reflection of the power imbalances between the British Empire and its subjects. Dubbed the "Lunatic Express," the railway project with its poor working conditions for around 37,000 Indian labourers would define and inform the actions and behaviours of the Tsavo lions and the indentured

labourers.[39] Patterson's own fraught relationship with labourers would lead to two separate murder plots following the decision to unilaterally alter labourers' contracts to institute "a system of piecework".[40] Patterson portrays himself as courageous and "determined" in the face of the "evil and murderous-looking" labourers whom he successfully puts back to work by "haranguing them in Hindustani".[41] As the historian William K. Storey has highlighted, it is unlikely that many of the labourers even understood Hindustani, and it did not stop a second incident, which resulted in "the scoundrels" being imprisoned.[42] The plots illustrate the limits of Patterson's authority but showcase what the political scientist James C. Scott described as everyday actions of resistance, sometimes violent but more often taking the form of non-compliance.[43] After a continued spate of lion attacks, the "ordinary Indian" labourers deserted the "accursed" railway, refusing "to [be a] supply [of] food" for the lions.[44] The labourers' decision to use non-compliance is only partially explained by Patterson's assertion that the labourers "will not stand constant terrors".[45] Instead, it is indicative of how the labourers' strategies and acts of resistance changed as a product of the lions' attacks, but also of what the lions represented in terms of poor working conditions and the failure of the British Empire to successfully manage the railway. Overemphasis on the monster and monster-slayer narrative risks obscuring these acts of resistance by labourers, highlighting the importance of an approach that dissects cultural assertions surrounding the lion attacks.

Historical contextualisation of the 1898 lion attacks reveals the longstanding connections between the attacks and the British Empire, complicating the cultural depiction of the lions' attacks and, by extension, the relationships that defined British Imperialism in East Africa. The lions opportunistically took advantage of the railway construction, which led to subsequent disruptions and their demise. The lions' agency and the agency of humans involved were the product of multiple co-constitutive processes. This essay's interspecies approach has sought to disentangle this co-constitutive process by explaining the connections between the lions' attacks, labourer resistance, and British Imperialism. This has included using scientific reports to contextualise some of Patterson's claims and to provide insight into the lions' actions. By understanding the cultural and historical ecology of the Tsavo region, the lion attacks' relationship with British Imperialism becomes clearer. Thus, allowing for a clearer examination of the colonial depiction of the lion attacks, which reveals the lions' opportunism and the role of labour resistance in shaping the British Imperial project's response to the attacks.

Cephalopods

oil, paper, and acrylic resin on wood panel

DOMINIQUE CROWLEY

M.Phil. in Digital Arts and Intermedia Practices





Liquid Form #1

ink on paper

MASHA LYUTOVA

M.Sc. Immunotherapeutics

'How it resists the whip / by loving it':

The Queer Poetics of Padraig Regan's *Some Integrity*

ALICE WEATHERLY

M.Phil. in Modern and Contemporary Literary Studies

when I look [sic.] at my life, I saw that queerness demanded an alternative innovation from me

(Ocean Vuong, 'All The Ways To Be with Bryan Washington & Ocean Vuong', A24, Dec 21, 2020)

For Ocean Vuong, being queer means coming in at a different angle. His notion of 'queerness demand[ing] an alternative innovation' speaks to a pull towards breaking from the typical, and while this could be in reference to living, writing, or both, 'innovation' is especially interesting in the context of contemporary queer poetics, connoting formal innovation, linguistic innovation, innovative ways of thinking, working, publishing, and so on. It is difficult, however, to ignore the strength of 'demanded': given the ideas we might associate with queerness (slipping beyond constraints, shunning structures of normalcy and the pressure to live within them), 'demanded' conjures up a paradox, painting queerness as a governing, unforgiving force that requires something of the queer individual. Does the mere possession of a marginalised identity make 'demands' on the contemporary queer writer – dictate their writing? If so, is there any middle ground between being

a writer who yields, obedient, and a writer who firmly resists?

We encounter this in Padraig Regan's *Some Integrity*,[1] a collection of poetry which both rejects a catalogue of the authorities it is in dialogue with (straightness; queerness; poetic form; literary tradition) while simultaneously embracing the structure they bring, assuming a magnetic force of its own as it attempts to defy a spectrum of expectation. A close reading of Regan's poetry suggests it simultaneously exemplifies the 'alternative innovation' associated with the queer writer in Vuong's statement, while also resisting the demands structures like 'queerness' might put upon them. Taking leave from Paul B. Preciado's manifesto-like 'Letter from a Trans Man to the Old Sexual Regime', which claims 'What is most urgent is […] to disidentify ourself from the political coercion which forces us to desire the norm and reproduce it', the power of Regan's persistently slippery, disobedient poetics is, I argue, in its 'disidentification'; breaking from behavioural 'norm[s]', these texts seek liberation through a refusal to submit to either oppressive tradition or the pressures of fresh 'innovation'.[2]

Perhaps an appropriately 'disobedient' entry into *Some Integrity* is to begin midway through, with the prose piece 'Glitch City', where Regan tackles issues of identity and categorisation head-on. The fact a personal essay surfaces midway through of a collection of poetry can be read as a representation of the ideas it purports: in saying 'the categories we receive as common knowledge' (p. 47), such as states of matter, gender, and sexuality, 'are heuristic at best and cannot account for the true complex variety of being', Regan's prose signals toward the inadequacy of 'categories' like poetry and bends genre expectations, disrupting what a reader might 'receive as common knowledge' and surprising them with the essay's very presence. While the form of 'Glitch City' in itself is nothing radical, it looks to 'disidentify [itself]' from the categories of both essay and poetry; the piece on queerness, materiality, and the massacre at Pulse nightclub attempts to 'account for the true complex variety' of form in its evasion of genre preconceptions. Is this an essay, a poem, both, or neither? Compared to its initial appearance in PN *Review* – a journal of poetry and poetry-related prose – under the 'Poems & Features' section, 'Glitch City' is arguably freer, more protean and versatile, in the poetry collection, as while we expect to find writing resembling essay in a publication like PNR, its inclusion in *Some Integrity* is more 'disobedient', disrupting and upending fixed notions of form.[3]

In contrast to its sense of freedom, however, is the fact that getting to 'Glitch City' is like unpacking a matryoshka doll. Framing the essay and Regan's groups of

poems are five headings, and 'Glitch City' comes under 'III: (Capriccio)', both an artistic term for fantastical paintings which lay out the architecture they depict in unexpected ways, and a musical one, denoting an often fast, formally free piece, thus doubling on the 'alternative innovation' and formal disobedience of the essay it introduces. After disavowing 'categorisation', there is a tension in how Regan submits to its 'demands': headings throughout the collection ('(Studies)', '(Reproductions)', etc.) put poetry into distinct rooms, separate gallery exhibitions, where the deployment of parentheticals doubly performs constraint, enclosing titles in picture frames. Yet, such headings can only *perform* constraint. Possessing just 'some integrity', the fact that texts spanning all five sections echo one another thematically, speaking back and forth, slipping outside of drawn borders, suggests a rejection of strict formal segregation. Musings on glass and windows pervade the collection, for instance: a 'whisper of glass' (2) in 'Vermeer's *Supper at Emmaus*', Laika's 'window' (6) in 'The Understudies', and 'the window / of the train' (1-2) beginning 'Ireland' are just a handful of examples, perhaps conceptually cohering at 'Glitch City's' miniature thesis which floats the notion of 'glass as a queer material'. Thinking with Angela Leighton, who, in exploring Coleridge's concept of "*forma efformans*' (forming form)', puts forward that 'Form is not a body but an agent. It forms', Regan's endeavour into rigid form reads as calculated: a purposeful erection of a solid structure they only intend to dismantle.[4] Instead, 'slip[ing] outside of the mathematics' and 'warping […] to a location that does not exist' ('Glitch City', 51), the poetry of *Some Integrity* refuses to stay stuck in and as one 'body'. Here, language is an 'agent', active and alive.

If Regan's queer poetics is an agent, however, it is a double one, both obeying and blatantly disregarding the demands of strict formalism, organising itself via an aesthetics of categorisation and simultaneously 'disidentify[ing]' itself from any hard notion of definition. In this, an intriguing correspondence emerges between Regan's 'alternative innovation' and the picture of contemporary Irish Queer Studies suggested by Noreen Giffney in 'Quare Theory': 'While queer theory might have a tentative home in Women's Studies,' Giffney claims, 'Irish Queer Studies remains an amorphous shape haunting the contours of Irish studies and queer studies'.5 It might be said that Regan's formal 'innovation' mirrors the 'amorphous shape' of the critical umbrella, 'Irish Queer Studies', their work comes under: *Some Integrity* 'haunt[s] the contours' of a straight, strict formalism and a more malleable, queer fluidity, its reverberating in different theories and practices of poetry, not finding a fixed 'home' in any given one.

A reverberation and 'haunting' of 'the contours' are reminiscent of

another text in *Some Integrity* that first surfaced elsewhere. 'Salt Island' introduces *Queering the Green*, a collection of twenty-first century, queer Irish poetics.[6] At the end of the poem, the speaker considers 'what it means when all this naming […] is just another way of saying I, I, I, I, I' (25-27) – given that every other poem in *Some Integrity* is, without fail, conclusively end-stopped with a punctuation mark, the absence of one here is telling. By omitting the device that would put a definitive end to the sentence, the voice of the 'I' sounds beyond the space of 'Salt Island' and, in the case of *Queering the Green*, throughout the rest of the collection. Maddern's belief that 'what happens' in the opening piece 'occurs in poem after poem you will encounter here' (xxix) speaks to the persevering 'I' ringing past its appearance, the editor's own use of repetition ('poem after poem') quietly reproducing the resonance of Regan's ending. Such echoes Seán Hewitt's 'A Ministry', which opens his *Rapture's Road* (2024): in its concluding lines, 'When I break, / I break, predictably, into song –' (42-43), the dash performs an instant detachment, a sudden leave-taking from itself, but also opens the text up to the 'song' or 'song[s]' that follow it; that perhaps complete it.[7] To go further, we might turn to Judith Butler's idea of the 'I' in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, wherein they argue for the existence of 'a sociality at the basis of the 'I'', since it is 'constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, sustained by a social world'.[8] Here, even the most lyrical, most apparently self-involved verse can be conceived of something existing in and interacting with the 'social world'; Regan's resounding 'I' illustrates this sense of an inescapable 'relationality' with the inanimate, admitting their poetic descriptions, their 'naming', as a potentially narcissistic act, only forging more versions of the self out of what surrounds them. Turning back to the Vuong, then, what emerges as interesting is how this statement is entirely couched in the personal: 'when I looked at *my* life'. Challenging its introspection and speaking to Butler's fundamental relationality within and around the 'I', we might say, is my critical engagement with an introspective, lyrical quotation at all. Honing in on his confessional language, what unfolds is a dissolution of the walls of Vuong's 'I', granting it explicit license to mingle with a multitude of voices: my own, those of other critics, and of contemporary queer poetics.

The lyric 'I' of 'Salt Island' also exhibits its fluidity in executing a temporal transition over the course of the poem: the speaker's reflecting is framed by two 'I wanted' statements (1, 15), as their reflection on their desires out in the natural world becomes active living at the volta, with 'I scroll', 'I see', 'I wonder' (16-19). Joseph Valente notes how Giffney and Michael O'Rourke 'have insisted […] that queer is primarily a verb rather than a noun, a form of doing rather than being', and the movement of Regan's lyric 'I', from

past to present, country landscape to bedroom, the space of this poem to its extension beyond it, perhaps exemplifies that 'being' is not so stable; not fixed in place. This flexibility and 'sociality' are perhaps explored most thoroughly in the '(Still Lifes)' poems, musings on object – often food – that suggest the identities of the human and the inanimate are not fixed but fluid, 'doing rather than being'. 'Fidelity', for instance, introduces three subjects in its opening sentence: 'the apple' (1), the owner of 'these teeth' (2), and the speaker, 'my earlobe' (5). The text equates the 'flesh' (3) of the fruit to 'the skin' (7) of the human, arguably rendering them one: asking whether or not the 'teeth' and 'lips' making contact with the apple's 'pale green flesh' are disturbing to the object, having just 'pressed / into my earlobe' and 'still faintly tast[ing] / of my cum' (2-11), Regan's text considers the boundaries of human sexual encounter. When and where is sex 'completed', and does its narrative extend beyond the humans involved in the act, out toward and into the non-human, objects touched in its aftermath? Additionally, 'Blood' (6), 'juice' (9), and 'cum' (11) here do not only explicitly evoke sex, but the liquidity of both the human and natural form. This, it seems, is an environment which sees subjects leak out of their formal constraints and into one another, reminiscent of Alex Johnson's definition of queer ecology as 'the acknowledgement of the numberless relations between all things alive, once alive, and alive once again'.[9] In other words, perhaps, Regan poses that 'Fidelity' is impossible in a world of 'numberless relations'; saturated with contact and soaking in 'sociality', this is inevitable polyamory.

Even so, we might say there isn't anything daring, subversive, or 'alternative' about the form and content of 'Fidelity'. It is explicit, but makes no direct reference to gender-queerness or sexual identities that stray from the norm; polyamorous imagery pokes through, but I would not go so far as to say this is what the poem is 'about' in its entirety. Here, Regan demonstrates that while queerness could have 'demanded an alternative innovation' from their writing, such innovation bypasses the potential 'demand' to have one's identity represented at all times, and need not involve making direct allusions to their queer identity in every poem – even poems directly concerned with sexual politics. How is this, then, a queer poetics? This may be because the sense of Vuong's 'alternative innovation' remains. Preciado suggests that, 'For years, queer culture has been a laboratory for inventing new aesthetics of dissident sexualities', and while Regan certainly hasn't 'invent[ed]' the equation of fruit and sex (Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market' comes to mind[10]) there is something that might strike the reader as 'alternative', 'new', and 'dissident' in the fact Regan gives 'the apple' a subjectivity of its own. As in Rossetti's 'fruit globes fair or red' (128), or Angela Carter's 'her cunt a split fig', fruit is most often depicted

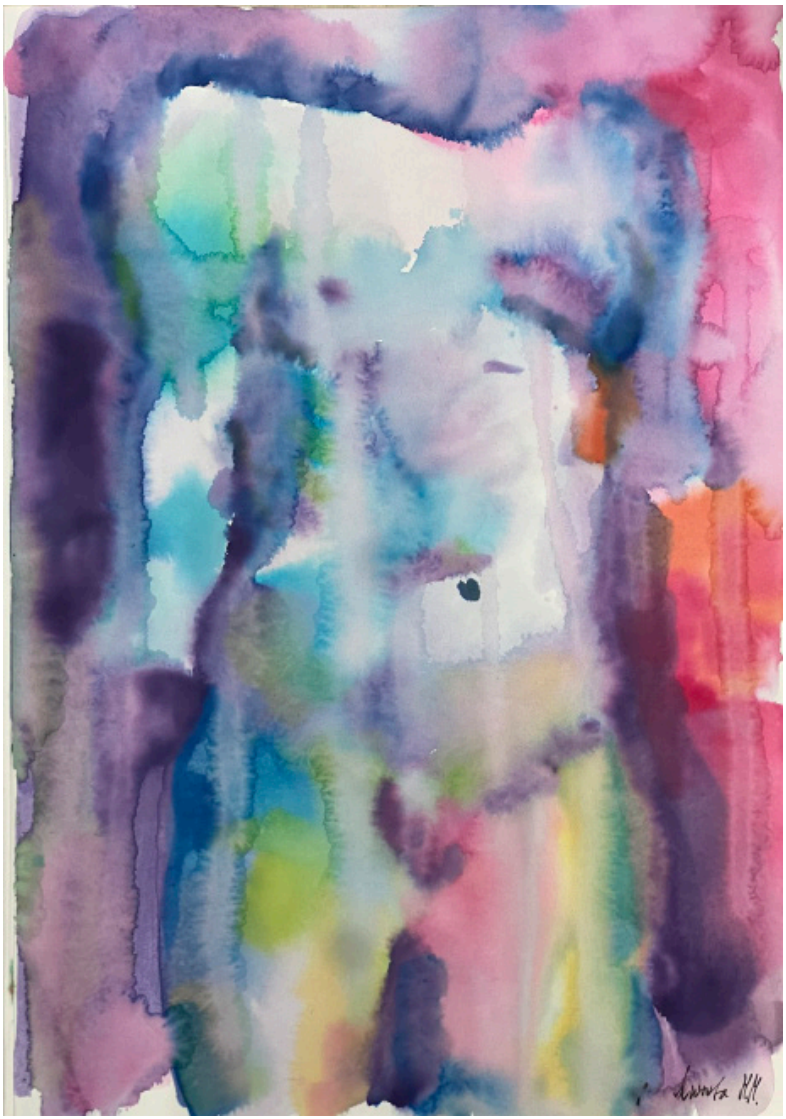
as secondary; sitting to be painted in the space of pure euphemism, fruit becomes mere literary accoutrement to the human sexual organ.[11] In contrast, what seems innovative and distinctly queer about poems in '(Still Lifes)' is how what is perceived as object is made subject, given flesh and consciousness. The permeable poetic flesh of 'A Grapefruit', for instance, welcomes suggestions of taste with sex, pain with pleasure: 'it hits the tongue as lack. / It tastes like punishment. / What more could I want?' (7-9) For a text that is so formally 'straight', presented to the reader in three even stanzas of three lines each, 'A Grapefruit' evokes the queer ecological by implicating its titular natural object in a miniature, physical scene of sadomasochistic desire.

Similarly, in 'Study of a Tomato', the speaker claims the titular subject 'has & is – / like everything – a body' (9-10), confidently acknowledging its physicality. Here, lineation is effective in isolating and colouring significant the crucial evidence of subjectivity, 'It has and is –'; as a subject, the tomato is capable of both being ('is') and being able to possess something ('has'), and Regan's line breaks highlight such a philosophy as crucial. In their recent essay on contemporary queer poetics, Kit Fryatt observes that *Some Integrity* takes a 'modernist excursion into ethical interrogation', which does well to exemplify how Regan both attaches themselves to so-called 'demands' of literary form and tradition while departing from them, executing a partial 'disidentifying', in order to paint a queer theory of bodies in an 'ethical interrogation'.[12] The collection is a 'modernist excursion' by way of poets like Gertrude Stein (her '*this is this*' is Regan's epigraph), attentive to the object, yet Regan's contemporary innovation is, while not violating its upfront simplicity, granting '*this*' new subjectivity. Regan goes beyond pure 'interrogation' and produces a hypothesis of the non-human, 'ethical' because it suggests we consider exactly how we recognise, or refuse to recognise, the ways in which objects might be just as alive as we are. This figures, for example, in the repeated imperatives in 'Study of a Tomato', as 'Imagine it' (1), 'Begin with this' (2), 'Establish' (3), 'Let's open it' (11), commanding attention and implicating the reader in the scene – the scene of thought – despite seemingly being directed towards the speaker themselves in the context of the poem. 'Study of a Tomato' also ends with a variation on Stein: 'This is this & only this' (24) defiantly reproduces Stein's insistence on the thing in itself while also extending it, reflecting how Regan borrows from 'modernist' poetics and propels its philosophy forward into new contexts.

Speaking in and beyond the voice of Stein is yet another example of how Regan's contemporary queer poetics of 'alternative innovation' demonstrates how boundaries, walls, and categories of being are 'heuristic at best'; this is a sprawling ecosystem of interaction. To conclude, however,

we might ask whether or not this sort of ecosystem can, actually, be accurately represented in and by literary criticism. In her introduction to a special, queer issue of the IUR, referring to the 'amorphous shape […] haunting the contours', Anne Mulhall notably detects 'the sense of a monstrous failure […] born in Giffney's description', where Irish Queer Studies lives 'outside of the grammars of intelligibility structuring either Irish Studies or Queer Studies.[13] While I have attempted to outline the malleability of a poetics which both rejects the demands of queerness and literary form and tradition while expressing queerness through 'alternative innovation', it would be overly optimistic to ignore that Mulhall's assessment of Giffney exposes a litany of issues. What is 'contemporary queer poetics'? What makes poetry queer? Is *Some Integrity* queer enough? Does my queer experience make me suitable to determine, authoritatively, how much a text adheres to received notions of queerness, whatever those are?

These questions are, perhaps, 'outside of the grammars of intelligibility'. Contemporary discourse arguably does admit 'a monstrous failure' in its inability to find a definitive answer to the question of what queer literature is. Yet, to take Mulhall's argument further, rather than then defaulting to defining queerness by a lack, by incapability, we should instead recognise the 'failure' of existing literary critical structures to contend with the 'amorphous shape[s]' of phenomena like queerness, Irishness, and queer Irishness. Rather than making 'demands' on more nebulous genres and categories, viewing them as things we simply *must* give form to, it is maybe more fruitful to accept them as they are, as 'doing rather than being'; to highlight rather than shy away from their formlessness, and permit continuous transformation.



Liquid Form #2

ink on paper

MASHA LYUTOVA

M.Sc. Immunotherapeutics

The Weak Links That Bind Us

CIAN MULKERN

M.Sc. in Quantum Science and Technology

Who are the people that have the greatest impact on our lives? One might assume that those closest to us, our 'strongest ties,' are most likely to exert influence, but sociologist Mark Granovetter, in his seminal paper on 'weak' and 'strong' ties, offers a different hypothesis. His theory, which generalises micro-level interpersonal relationships and embeds them into macro-level social structures, interestingly relates to how we understand the complexities of many-body physics.

Granovetter argued in 1973 for the "cohesive power of weak ties," suggesting that analysing relationships between people who are less closely connected can reveal important insights into how social groups interact and help identify aspects of social structure that may be overlooked when populations are divided into clearly defined cliques.[1] Throughout this study Granovetter illustrates different examples of how 'weaker' ties can lead to greater connectivity amongst a population. One of the studies Granovetter examines involved analysing the path that information could take in a large group. This paper took a sample population of pupils in a high school in Michigan and asked each person to rank their eight closest friends.[2] Horvath and Rapoport followed the networks that developed by following the preferences of individuals in a pairwise fashion. That is to say, from a starting point they looked at somebody's first two 'closest friends', then the closest friends of those two people, and so on until no new names were introduced to the network. This was then repeated following pairs down the lists. The results showed that "the smallest total number of people were reached through the networks generated by first and second choices—presumably the strongest ties—and the largest number through seventh and eight choices,"[3] foregrounding the point that interactions with one's weaker links may have greater impacts on a greater number of people. Another example provided by Granovetter to underline this

correlation comes in the form of the mobility of blue-collar workers. He went about this by asking a sample of working professionals who had recently started working in a new role that had been recommended to them by a contact how regularly they saw that contact. The thinking here is that the more often you see someone, the 'stronger' your tie. He found that "of those finding a job through contacts, 16.7% reported that they saw their contact often at the time, 55.6% said occasionally, and 27.8% rarely (N 54)."[4] Here, seeing someone 'rarely' equates to seeing them approximately once a year, 'occasionally' means more than once a year but less than twice a week, and 'often' denotes twice a week or more. This finding again highlights the importance of these weaker connections and how their influence on one's life could be substantial.

This theory echoes a similar pattern that can be observed in the dynamics of many-body systems; specifically, the interactions of particles on a large scale, the vibrations of atoms in a lattice—the basis of ground-up thermodynamics and of statistical mechanics. When we account only for the interactions between particles and their closest partners, their nearest neighbours [NN], modelling these dynamics can prove to be difficult; however, oftentimes, obtaining simple harmonic solutions to problems of large-scale movement is simpler than the alternative. The easiest example of such a system comes from lattice dynamics in solid state physics or the study of periodic structures. In an infinite 1-Dimensional chain of atoms that can only interact with the atoms on either side of itself, we find a simple harmonic relation for the dispersion of energy in the lattice. This means that as the quanta of vibrational energy—known as 'phonons'—move through the lattice we can graph this energy distribution using a trigonometric function like a sine or cosine wave.[5] This process, evidently, becomes increasingly complex when considering 2 and 3-dimensional systems, but the principle of the dynamics being relatively simple when only accounting for NN interactions still holds. Thus, to analyse these dynamics remains relatively simple when only looking at the closest connections. But what happens when we look further afield?

When we try to model even simple small-scale systems of particles, and account for all-to-all connectivity we can get some rather 'messy' results. If everything interacts, sometimes nothing moves, provoking a pure gridlock and complete restriction of movement. There is no interplay or flow between anything, just a purely rigid object. As we decrease the strictness of these interactions, only allowing for weak interactions between second nearest neighbours [2NN] and beyond, not allowing everything to touch everything, we can find some truly interesting results; different from the rigidity of total control, more dynamic than

the simple systems of NN. We find systems that, starting with the same initial conditions and given just a slight nudge, or perturbation, will spit out a different result every single time. Behaviour that is impossible to predict. These are dynamic systems that are untameable and irreproducible.

It is systems like these that inspired Edward Norton Lorenz. He observed that, when trying to model the dynamics of weather systems, the smallest perturbation could set his model off into a spiral. Twirling back and forth creating two flourishing elliptical shapes that met in the middle, an effigy of butterflies' wings. "it is found that nonperiodic solutions are ordinarily unstable with respect to small modifications, so that slightly differing initial states can evolve into considerably different states"[6]. This idea shaped the foundations of chaos theory and the 'butterfly effect'. While this notion has been widely extrapolated and romanticised in popular discourse—for example, the image that a butterfly flapping its wings off the coast of Brazil could cause a typhoon in Japan—the concept more precisely illustrates how small changes within a complex system can produce large effects on eventual outcomes.

The murmuration's of Starlings are a brilliant example of complex many-body dynamics that have fascinated people all over the world since they were first observed. The phenomenon of a beautiful, black, swirling mass of birds twisting around each other in the evening sky is believed to be a defense mechanism that starlings have devised to scare off potential predators. Through this behaviour they appear as a much larger entity than the single body of a starling, therein, protecting one another. The movement of starling murmurations captured the mind of Nobel Prize-winning Italian physicist Georgio Parisi, who was awarded the most prestigious prize in physics in 2021 for his foundational work on Spin-Glasses. Parisi has been a researcher in the 'Eternal City' of Rome for many years. In 2023, Parisi published a book entitled 'In a Flight of Starlings' where he discussed some ideas central to the philosophy of being a physicist, that being curious, asking questions, and observing the world around you are tools necessary to gain any sort of insight into the world we find ourselves living in as humans: "'Don't do too many things—concentrate on a few important ones.' [a friend advised me] On the one hand this was obviously good advice, but on the other it was precisely by studying many things at once that I was able to make connections between different fields—the basis of many of my later discoveries"[7]. One of the projects he describes in this book is a study he conducted on the murmurations of starlings. Parisi sought to answer the question of 'how do these birds stop themselves from crashing into one another while flying?' To answer this question himself and a team of researchers took to the rooftops of Rome, setting up high-speed cameras

that faced the sky in areas where the starlings would usually congregate. After analysing footage of these movements that were taken over a period of months Parisi and his team came to the conclusion that there is no secret as to how these birds avoid collision. They actually do collide quite frequently. However, they are very adept at adjusting their flight paths when such a collision occurs. The birds obviously can only bump into the birds directly above and below, in front and behind, and either side of themselves; they can only interact with their nearest neighbours. Parisi concluded that "the interaction between starlings depends not so much on the general distance between them as on the connections between the closest birds."[8] While this study did not lead to major advancements in the behavioural study of birds or lead to publication in any major research journal,[9] it did prove the benefit of asking a question.

By observing and studying the environments around us, the connections between disparate elements of the world, between fields of study as different as sociology and physics, make themselves apparent. Starlings in flight—bumping, adjusting, sometimes blind for the thick, black tangle of feathers obscuring their sight—are an apt metaphor for the structures underlying our universe and our personal lives. A step back is needed to observe these larger systems and reveal that often, it is weak connections that can excite the system enough to suggest a new path.

Basilisk

oil and acrylic resin on wood panel

DOMINIQUE CROWLEY

M.Phil. in Digital Arts and Intermedia Practices



From New York to 'Nueva Yol'

Bad Bunny and the Legacy of Nuyorican Creative Resistance

FLORA LEASK

M.Phil. in Comparative Literature

Puerto Rican musician Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, popularly known by his stage name Bad Bunny, continues the legacy of the Nuyorican movement, namely their message of anti-colonial social justice and cultural survival. The Nuyorican movement was a group of musicians, poets, and writers from the Puerto Rican diaspora which began among the 1960s New York milieu of avant-garde artists, musicians, and migrants, in neighbourhoods such as the Lower East Side and East Harlem.[1] Their goal was to give a voice to the Puerto Rican and wider pan-Latin communities in the United States, to counter the marginalisation, poverty, and racism they were facing there.[2]

Ocasio is a contemporary Puerto Rican musician who has contributed to the surge of Latin music that is dominating the Global Charts. His 2025 album *DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOTos [I Should Have Taken More Photos] (DTMF)* received six nominations for the upcoming 2026 Grammy Awards[3] and enjoys international acclaim. I will show how Ocasio's use of hybrid forms, language, music, and sampling links him to two founding figures of the Nuyorican movement, poets Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, and show him to be continuing their legacy of anti-colonial expression which reclaims and reaffirms Puerto Rican identity.

The recent history of Puerto Rico (PR) is one of colonialism and migration. The arrival of the Spanish to the island in the 16th century led to a prolonged colonial ruling of the autochthonous Taíno people. In 1898, a year after the Spanish granted PR independence, it was invaded by and made a territory of the United States (US),[4] which it remains. The prospect of better living conditions has led many Puerto Ricans to move to the US – although this creates a double bind in which Puerto Ricans are 'othered' and 'rendered socially second class'.[5] It was this 'othering' which the Nuyorican poets aimed to communicate through their poetry and music. The importance of music cannot be overstated

for PR and its diaspora, granting expression to 'a culture which has consistently been conditioned by a complex, overlapping, and often contradictory set of multiple identities'[6] according to Bernard-Carreño. First came the Cuban dance music which 'provided international audiences with a musical style that lacked direct associations with imperialist metropoles',[7] merging into the salsa which, in the 1960s, became 'a vehicle for Puerto Rican, Nuyorican, and pan-Latino identity'[8] in the barrios of New York. Finally, reggaeton is a contemporary genre based on 'hip hop's sample-based approach'[9] that merges Black and Latinx experience. These are just a few of the genres which establish the firm link in PR between music and liberation.

In *Nuyorican Poetry*, Algarín writes of the importance of music as both a balm to soothe the marginalised subject, and a beat to provoke one into a revolutionary joy of resistance. Talking of Ismael Rivera, famous Puerto Rican salsa singer, in his introduction, he writes: 'Latin music presides. Everybody dances… Exhausted factory muscles ripen into joy… Nuyorican life goes on in spite of the eternal debt for which there is an eternal hustle'.[10] He blurs the line between musician and the poet, choosing instead the word 'troubadour'[11] to encapsulate the street artist. Although Ocasio was born and raised in PR rather than New York, his latest album *DTMF* specifically focuses on Puerto Rican identity and freedom in a country where the US looms over many aspects of life.

Both Bad Bunny and the Nuyorican's use of 'Spanglish' can be seen as an example of minor literature as defined by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, with the political potential to reaffirm marginalised identities. Minor literature, according to D&G in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is that which is produced by a marginalized group within a dominant language.[12] Minor language, meanwhile, is composed of the dialects and verbal differences of marginalized groups; in a constant state of movement, the variables which comprise it in exist in a constant state of evolution.[13] Minor language has political potential in the way it can 'deterritorialize' – repurpose, break down – a major language, creating new linguistic forms that work better for the marginalized collective.[14] This is akin to Algarín's writing on the importance of 'Spanglish' for the Nuyorican poet: 'a new day needs a new language or else the day becomes a repetition of yesterday'.[15] Language must evolve to accommodate new communities; new communities must evolve a new language to fit their surroundings. As Gloria Anzaldúa, theorist of English/Spanish hybridity, writes, "for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language?"[16]

The fact that 'Spanglish' lacks standardised grammar or rules gives

it a transformative power, harnessed by Ocasio as he renames the city of New York to 'Nueva Yol' in the song 'NUEVAYoL' and deterritorializes the city.[17] In an inherently political act, it no longer belongs to those who claim wrongly that it is predominantly an English-speaking city – as D&G say, New York is 'virtually a city without language'[18] due to the linguistic fecundity brought by its cultural milieu. 'Nueva Yol' is written how Ocasio himself would pronounce New York, dropping the 'rk' to a softer 'l' which is characteristic of Puerto Rican Spanish. He also translates 'New' to 'Nueva', thus repositioning the city to a Spanish speaking perspective. In doing this he reclaims New York in an Algarínesque fashion for the diaspora who live there. 'Poetry is the fill act of naming. Naming states of mind'[19] (10) states Algarín, who achieved this reclaiming the original insulting meaning of 'Nuyorican'[20] in an act of de- and re-territorialization, linking the two artists' methods of political writing.

Ocasio's choice of music genre – salsa, reggaeton, and bomba among more traditional pop or R&B styles – also put into praxis Algarín's theory of Nuyorican language and identity through sampling and style in 'NUEVAYoL'. Again, here we can use D&G's theory of minor language, specifically in regard to its relation to music. The closer a language gets to a 'dissolution of constant form', they claim 'the closer it comes not only to a system of musical notation, but also to music itself.'[21] Creating a new language for the community is the job of the poet/musician, who 'names' and reclaims. Ocasio's formal musical choices therefore also fall under the category of minor literature, his reggaeton and salsa 'telling the tale of the streets'[22] just as much as his lyrics.

'NUEVAYoL' is a hybrid of contemporary dembow (the characteristic rhythmic pattern of reggaeton) and salsa. This hybridity of an old and a new genre, both of which have anti-colonial associations, is an example of Algarín's 'new day' needing a 'new language'. The dembow/reggaeton genre is significant as, according to Marshall, it 'supported a youth- and class-inflected cultural politics of blackness and did so, significantly, by embracing (if not amplifying) the Nuyorican dimensions of Puerto Rican culture.'[23] Given reggaeton's derivation from reggae, the genre also goes back to PR's pre-colonial Antillean roots. It acknowledges the importance of New York as 'the cultural crucible where Puerto Ricans, Panamanians, Jamaicans, and African-Americans, among others, encountered each other and contributed to a shared, contested, and culturally-charged soundscape.'[24] The blend of revolutionary Cuban salsa and dembow therefore collide powerfully in 'NUEVAYoL' to make an anti-colonial statement in music form.

This is further reinforced by Ocasio's use of samples in the song – sampling being the act of taking snippets from

other songs and incorporating them into a new melody to create a layered and historical music. The song begins with the proclamation '¡Nueva Yol!' [New York!] from the song 'Mamá Borinquen Me Llama [Mother, Puerto Rico is calling me]' by Andrés Jiménez, El Jíbaro – a song about forced migration, which laments the physical and spiritual coldness of New York compared to PR. Immediately after, Ocasio uses another sample, this one from 'Un Verano en Nueva York' [A Summer in New York] by El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, the refrain of which will reappear in the chorus of the song.

If you want to have fun
With charm and grace
You only have to live
A summer in New York (lines i-iv)

The lyrics are deeply ironic when contrasted with the hardships presented by Nuyorican poets, in particular Piñero's later discussed poem. However, they do express the liberating aspect of Latin Music for the diaspora – in which one can still 'have fun/with charm and grace' (i-ii) in New York. Finally, Ocasio injects his own meaning into the lyrics by adding interjections, as if replying to the singers:

You only have to live (*What's with the cold?*)
A summer in New York (*Just for a bit, no more*) (lines vii – viii, my italics)

These replies poke fun at the glorification of the city presented in the original song, complaining about the weather 'What's with the cold?', and making clear the intention of return, subverting popular ideas of immigrants as looking to stay long-term and assimilate into a new culture as quickly as possible. Ocasio's deterritorialization of New York, as reflected through his choice of samples and music genre, is therefore an anti-colonial and political message told through minor language, aligning with the major themes of Nuyorican poetry: language, cultural survival, as well as tales of migration.

Another of Ocasio's songs from his *DTMF* album which features explicitly political lyrics is 'LO QUE PASÓ A HAWAii' [What Happened to Hawaii].[25] This is a song in which Ocasio compares the political situations of Puerto Rico to Hawaii as two islands which have been colonised by the United States. It begins with a repetitive, slow, synth introduction, in a minor key, tonally different from the rest of the album. The chorus parallels Piñero's political and emotive tone:

They want to take my river and the beach too
They want my neighborhood and for grandma to leave
No, don't let go of the flag or forget the lelolai
I don't want them to do to you what happened to Hawaii (lines 11-14)

At this point the meaning of the song becomes apparent – the question

of what happened to Hawaii is answered, it became incorporated into the USA as its 50th state, something which Ocasio makes clear through his lyrics must be avoided to preserve Puerto Rican identity. He asks that his listeners not let go of the flag, or forget the 'lelolai', a song or vocalisation used in Puerto Rico by the *Jíbaro*, a traditional type of rural farmer which is often used as a symbol for working-class identity and island pride.[26] In verse two, Ocasio specifically mentions the issue of migration:

Here, no one wanted to leave and whoever left dreams of returning
If one day it's my turn, it'll hurt me so much (lines 15-16)

Just as the Nuyoricans explicitly and plainly warn the reader of the dangers of living in New York as a marginalised minority, Ocasio too is open about the violence of migration. It is comparable to Piñero's manifesto-like tone, albeit from the perspective of the islander who must leave rather than the migrant who has arrived in a new city. Colonial violence is therefore portrayed as having a visceral psychological as well as physical effect. This is in accordance with Gloria Anzaldúa's account of being 'jerked out by the roots, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and history'.[27] The pain may be psychological or physical, but the image of bodily harm is consistent. To be removed forcibly from a place ultimately involves a ripping or severing in which one's culture and identity is seen as an extension of the body. The pain described by Ocasio and Piñero's are two sides of the same coin, showing both the agony of having to leave, and the alienation and violence that a marginalised diaspora faces in a new city.

The ideas and themes within the Nuyorican movement as represented by Algarín can be compared to songs from Ocasio's album *DTMF*. This comparison needs to be grounded in the historical context of both artists, accounting for their differences – immigrant poets in 1970s New York who discuss colonial violence versus a global 'king of pop' from Puerto Rico with anti-colonial elements in his music. Despite these differences, Ocasio does indeed inherit important themes from the Nuyorican movement – and is in fact more liberated to do so through the cultural impact made by past Nuyoricans who forged their identities and communities in the furnace of New York. Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of language and music provide a more theoretically concrete base for Algarín's theories of anti-colonial identity formation, as well as an examination of Ocasio's lyrics and musical choices. Ocasio takes up the role of the Nuyorican 'troubadour' who 'tells the tale of the streets to the streets'[28] in a blend of music and poetry, achieving this through textual and musical references, hybrid musical styles and an underlying anti-colonial theme to his new album. By 'using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them,'[29] he

rewrites the history of New York through a Nuyorican lens, as well as outlining the threat that the United States poses on his home island of Puerto Rico. Although separated by time and place, Ocasio and the Nuyorican movement both express the damage caused by the United States' presence in Puerto Rico, and their resistance, through creative expression.

The Responsibility to Protect:

A Comparative Between Its Implementation in Libya and Kenya.

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A universal criticism that has been routinely levied against the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P) in its effectiveness at vindicating human rights has been that it will only be used where the most powerful states in the world would view it as justified to do so. This has been noted to be of relevance to Gaza, where the Israeli attacks have been labelled as genocidal by several experts and yet the Israeli government continues to receive tacit support from the United States of America (US).[1] R2P, as seen in its peaceful deployment in Kenya and its violent implementation in Libya, has been shown to depend on its conduciveness with the dominating interests of the intervening states or institutions. R2P, as endorsed in the 2005 World Summit, declared that every state has a responsibility to protect its inhabitants from mass atrocities and that this responsibility may fall to the broader international community should peaceful means be inadequate and the national authorities have failed in their duty.[2] The cases of Kenya and Libya suffered from different, yet corresponding issues which made both their interventions legally dubious. The intervention in Libya featured accusations that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had acted beyond the scope of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (SC) resolution 1973 and had thusly taken disproportionate measures and violated Article 2(7) of the UN Charter. These measures included overtly taking the side of the anti-government.[3] In Kenya's case, there was controversy over the failure to prosecute those responsible for the extreme violence that transpired following the contested results of the 2007 election.[4]

By comparing the two cases on R2P in terms of fulfilling their respective legal obligations, we find that R2P begins and ends where its effective deployment converges with the interests of important international actors; that the rhetoric surrounding the doctrine is still plagued by its historical roots in western imperialism, and as a result, that the use of mechanisms like the

International Criminal Court (ICC) actually may prove to be more of a liability to the resolution of crises. However, such mechanisms still have influence on political developments. The dependence on state interests leads to the conclusion that regional organizations like the African Union (AU) promise the best way forward for R2P, and that mediatory measures will be required to produce legitimate outcomes.

With regards to human rights, Kenya and Libya were considered 'test cases' for R2P. The UN and its constituent members sought to prevent a humanitarian disaster due to a failure to intervene like in the case of Rwanda.[5] The reasoning for both interventions were however marred substantially by self-interest. Realism theory opines that international affairs are still predominantly determined by states and on where their strategic interests lie.[6] Indeed, some of the first cases of humanitarian interventions, such as Britain and Russia against the Ottoman Empire to protect revolting Greeks from massacres in the 19th century, were masks to secure geopolitical interests like the containment of Russian expansion.[7] Likewise, Libya during the 2011 Arab Spring posed issues for European security, principally the prospective flow of refugees from North Africa to Southern Europe and the concern over a conflict being so close to the continent. The countries which took the largest role in the R2P intervention were also the most dependent on Libyan Oil imports, namely France, the United Kingdom and Italy. The US took a supporting role as its interests were not sufficiently concerned.[8] In Kenya's case, it was rather the interests of international actors which gave rise to the quick and timely reaction to the post-election crisis there. Kenya was viewed as an important stabilizer in the region by the UN. It also acted as a multilateral station hosting UN headquarters and more than 1,000 international staff. The traditionally pro-western foreign policy of Kenya and its cruciality to the war on terror due to its proximity to Somalia further made the country's stability indispensable to Western countries, which informed their role.[9] Hence, it was clear that the humanitarian interventions took place in the context of interest rather than purely altruism.

The interests of the respective intervening actors led to them having divergent end-goals in the two cases, which impacted their perceived legitimacy. Kenya's western preference and relatively limited Anti-colonial rhetoric[10] had the actions taken in that country appear to assume the form of protecting democracy through conciliatory measures. Following from a collective understanding among the UN negotiation team that 'neither side can govern Kenya by itself' due to the results of the 2007 election making it impossible to form a single-party government, uniting and reconciling the nation via mediation became the chief aim.[11] This led to subdued

language dominating the discourse to reduce tension. The term 'dialogue' was used for the process as it sounded more conciliatory than 'mediation' and played down the level of external involvement.[12] Even after the crisis, the 2013 election saw demands in the media to 'let peace prevail' and for the washing away of further conflict.[13] There were also very few references to the term 'Responsibility to Protect' throughout the forty-one days of the mediation process or in the media. This may demonstrate just how skeptical countries in the global South are of R2P as an actual doctrine due to it being frequently dubbed a tool of western imperialism, to the extent that its mention in negotiations may have a negative effect. Nevertheless, former Secretary general Kofi Anaan referred to R2P as an important, if unmentioned, motivation for initiating the mediation process.[14]

The role of the AU in both cases profoundly impacted the legitimacy of intervention. During the Kenya crisis, the mediation process was spearheaded by the AU with the backing of the UN. The global response to the intervention being centered around the AU added legitimacy[15] to the R2P process due to the organization's legal right to intervene under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act.[16] It was also regarded as a triumph of specifically African diplomacy as the panel which was appointed to chair the mediation process was composed of eminent African personalities like Kofi Anaan.[17]

The opposite route was taken in Libya, where it appeared that the realist approach of NATO was injected with a 'liberal interventionist' worldview to topple Gaddafi's regime.[18] This is evidenced by the fact that no attempt at compromise was undertaken by any of the involved parties. The romanticization of the conflict via reporting and speeches constructed a narrative for Western publics which legitimated the idea of forceful intervention. The framing of the crisis produced a dialectic of one side as the enemy. In President Obama's speech to the UN, he depicted the conflict in Libya as the people having formed a united front against Gaddafi's regime and as part of the wider Arab Spring,[19] despite the ideological divisions among the protesters themselves and some estimations that Gaddafi still enjoyed sizable support among the Libyan population.[20] In British media, the rebels were characterized as 'freedom fighters' and individuals with normal professions in society who chose to fight reluctantly, which attracted public sympathy.[21] Further, unlike in Kenya, external involvement was not downplayed. The media reporting and political speeches even started to echo the ideals of liberal interventionism. In his speech, Obama affirmed the vision to secure first generation rights like the right to assembly.[22] Media reporting of the crisis was defined by referring to certain acts which made the Gaddafi regime appear particularly brutal and 'barbaric', such as the sexualized violence against women.[23] Such reporting

may have generated a desire for intervention which Nyere stated was linked to the 'historical process of colonial/racial domination.' Such a process involved distinguishing between humans and non-humans in legitimizing domination, by juxtaposing savage practices with the gendered protection that would come from military intervention by 'civilized states'.[24] Obama also dehumanized Gaddafi by portraying him as tyrannical and brutal,[25] portraying the Libyans as innocent victims in need of democratic enfranchisement and America as the necessary savior. In such a way, Xypolia suggests that this rhetoric is reminiscent of the old Eurocentric discourse surrounding non-western societies, as well as the idea of American exceptionalism'.[26] This friend-enemy dichotomy was made manifest by NATO's military actions against solely one side in the Libyan conflict. The coalition took numerous measures such as supplying rebel forces with intelligence and training,[27] launching airstrikes against Libyan military assets and even targeting Gaddafi himself.[28] These actions, although they went beyond the scope envisioned by Resolution 1973,[29] were justified on the basis that the coalition enjoyed a wide discretion in that resolution's implementation and that they were necessary to protect the civilians from regime forces.[30] Nevertheless, there was discrimination between pro-regime and anti-regime elements. Resolution 1973 mandated that measures protecting the entire population ought to be taken. Hence, any weakening of Government forces would have had to be balanced out by a weakening of the rebel forces if pro-Gaddafi civilians were to be protected from such groups,[31] especially given reports of kidnappings and murders committed by the rebels against regime loyalists.[32] However, NATO's military actions and their support of the rebels in their rejections of all ceasefires offered by Gaddafi had demonstrated that NATO was directly supporting a side in civil war.[33] This violated Article 2(7) of the UN charter, which prohibited intervention or the use of force.[34]

The AU sought to reach a peaceful resolution and strike a balance between respecting Libya's sovereignty whilst condemning Gaddafi. Like in Kenya, they prioritized regional stability. In reaction to the outbreak of conflict, the AU established an ad-hoc committee which produced a roadmap towards a solution. However, NATO's military operation sidelined the AU from the affair,[35] which reinforced the notion that the West took complete control of the conflict. This was proven when criticisms from Russia, China and India about the 'misguided and mismanaged' operations of NATO began to mount. Even so, at this point it was too late to reverse course.[36]

The un-comprising position taken by the West seemed to reveal a wider lack of long-term planning from among the intervening states, unlike the four-point agenda which was composed by the AU to resolve the Kenya crisis.[37] It also emboldened the various rebel

organizations which worked within the country. Thusly, when Gaddafi fell, there was a power vacuum in the country as no political resolution had been achieved.[38]

The interests of the main actors contributed to the ineffectiveness of the ICC in punishing human rights violators. First, Libya was subjected to a unanimous referral from the UN SC to the ICC to investigate crimes committed by the Gaddafi regime, which was a sign of strong international support for the tribunal's role in the R2P process.[39] There were hopes of using NATO as a surrogate enforcer. However, the rebels refused to extradite suspects as they figured that the ICC's jurisdiction would include allowing the prosecutions of anti-Gaddafi fighters.[40] When the interests of the coalition in resolving the crisis by trying to reach an agreement with the rebel militias came into conflict with the ICC's aim of criminal accountability, the western powers deferred to the local courts and exerted no diplomatic pressure on the rebels to hand over suspects.[41] This was due to the coalition's reliance on the militias to provide security in the region, on account of the US and NATO's economic troubles rendering a western occupation more tenuous.[42] As a result, human rights grievances against some rebels for the alleged massacres of anti-Gaddafi loyalists were never redressed. NATO's abandonment of the ICC also led to further human rights violations, namely the botched trials of former members of the Gaddafi regime such as Abdullah Senussi.[43] Similarly, the compromise pursued in Kenya via the formation of a Government of National Unity made any attempt from the ICC Chief Prosecutor to investigate post-election killings more difficult. On October 20th, 2008, Kenyan President Kibaki stated that he is 'aware that many Kenyans require justice for past injustices but let us also keep in mind that… justice must be tempered with forgiveness for reconciliation to take root.'[44] Despite being a signatory to the Rome statute and failing to set up a domestic tribunal, the Kenyan government had the AU adopt the position that these cases 'threatened the process of reconciliation in the country.'[45] Human rights abuses continued to occur, with witness and victim intimidation being rampant in the country. For example, the trial of Uhuru Kenyatta—the former leader of the Kenya National African Union Party and one of the accused orchestrators of the post-election violence—was persistently delayed by the failure to secure witness testimonies.[46] Importantly, the local ruling elites were fiercely opposed to ICC involvement in both Kenya and Libya due to their general hostility to external interference. Kenyan leaders pointed to the ICC's historical focus on Africa as the main source of their grievances, with the leaders of the two main parties even campaigning on their anti-ICC stances.[47] Meanwhile, the Libyan rebels viewed the ICC referral as an infringement on their country's sovereignty.[48]

However, the ICC had soft law effects which were instrumental for achieving R2P goals. The referral to the ICC was used as a tool for de-legitimatizing the Gaddafi regime.[49] It immediately preceded condemnations of human rights violations from the Arab League and the AU.[50] The referral was also used as a threat to coerce Gaddafi into changing his behavior.[51] The threat of additional charges being levied from the ICC may have had further political effects in Kenya by acting as a deterrent to politicians engaging in hate speech in the lead-up to the 2013 elections.[52] The soft law effects of the ICC may therefore be a sign that R2P is more effective as a supporting mechanism than a direct policy.

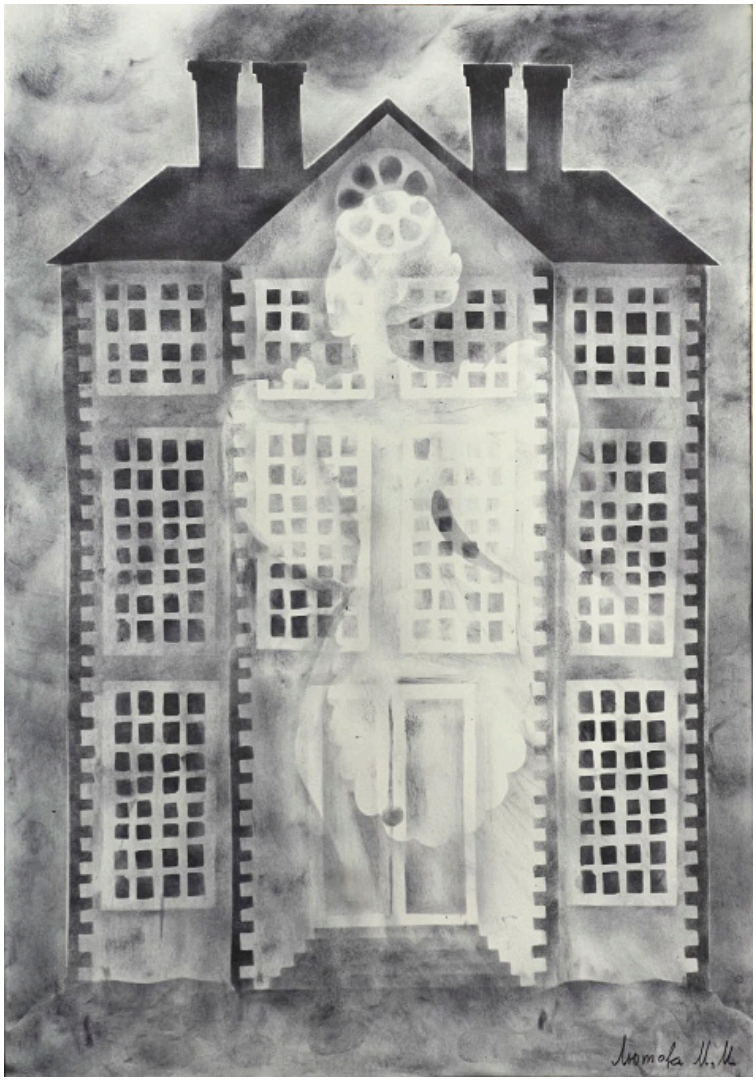
R2P has not shed the stigma of being a tool for the interests of powerful international actors. Military interventions, due to the failure to pursue legal conciliatory measures, resulted in friend-enemy dichotomies whereby violence continues to beget violence as the freedom-fighters exacted reprisals against the former powerholders. Such positions are then entrenched by the media. In Libya, the actions taken to prevent massacres resulted in even grander consequences for the region, such as a new civil war and the Refugee Crisis. Moreover, R2P and ICC's relegation to the alternative position of supporting roles in the backdrop of political dialogue or mediation seems to give rise to tangible results, such as in the mediation process in Kenya.[53] These developments affirm the importance of regional organizations like the AU, which has a greater incentive to prioritize regional stability than aloof western powers and a greater claim to legitimacy in conducting interventions as they avoid R2P's colonial stigma. However, the fixation of the AU on reconciliation had also come at the expense of justice. By giving Kenyan politicians effective immunity from further prosecution, R2P prevented further bloodshed by addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of the crisis. Such divisions in Kenyan politics would persevere and once again take shape after the 2017 election, where 24 people were killed in riots protesting the election results.[54] Therefore, it is argued that the UN's capabilities as an independent actor will also need to be bolstered. As shown in Kenya, the UN's interests in the region were decisive in their willingness to act. Even if the logic of Realism is accepted, a capable UN with direct tangible interests in troubled parts of the world would make it another powerbroker that can act as a central player with a material motivation towards securing peace rather than an entity existing at the margins of geopolitics between nation states.

Angel in the House

ink on paper

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The Ghost in the House:

Domestic Entrapment in Victorian Ghost Stories

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"Who–What, Where, Wherefore, Why–oh! do be a woman, and give me all possible details"[1]

- Elizabeth Gaskell

Ghost stories evolved as a literary mode most notably during the Victorian time period, emerging in response to a pervasive cultural ideology asserting that a woman's proper place was in the home. Just as ghosts were tethered to the house, women were confined to the domestic sphere in a near-haunting way. The Victorian ideal of womanhood was mainly associated with configurations of domesticity and motherhood, which formed firm expectations for women to provide a good influence on their husband and children. This ideal is perhaps best represented by Coventry Patmore's narrative poem *The Angel in the House*–a 200-page meditation on the nature of love and marriage–published in installments from 1854 to 1862. "The Wife's Tragedy," from Canto IX, illuminates the role of the Angel, and hence of the wife, in terms of this ideal:

Man must be pleased: but him to please
Is woman's pleasure: down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself…[2]

The passage above emphasises selflessness, servitude, and self-sacrifice as composite feminine traits, portraying the wife as the domestic anchor, responsible for creating a peaceful refuge within the home to which the man can always return. The ghost corresponds with this image of the Angel, providing a counterpart to the idealized figure of the Victorian woman.

In his seminal text *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition*, Victor Sage argues that, by the nineteenth century, the supernatural became a vehicle for reaction. Drawing on Christian iconography, Sage notes that the body is often represented as "the house or mansion of the soul."[3] He argues that "sin, however, makes this state of mind and body into a dungeon, a permanent prison."[4] This is illustrated by gothic and supernatural fiction, which draws attention to the

darkness and decay of the house in order to create a metaphor for the body and the grave. A woman's confinement within the house is thereby not only equivalent to imprisonment, but was also a kind of death in and of itself. This metaphor is literalised through the mode of the supernatural, as the spectral woman is condemned to remain within the house. In relation to the dissemination of Darwinian theory in the latter half of the century, emphasizing touch as a fundamental means by which individuals orient themselves in the world, the ghost inhabits a paradoxical form; it is characterised as an absent presence.

In *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*, Vanessa D. Dickerson seeks to explain the attraction of the supernatural for women. She argues that the Victorian condition of "in-betweenness" was particularly resonant among women who were similarly situated in a state of indeterminacy. Women profoundly identified with the ghost's paradoxical position of enforced liminality. The liminal state is, in fact, frequently likened to death. Dickerson extracts the spectral essence of Victorian womanhood, portraying the woman as "a figure of indeterminacy, of imperiled identity, of substance and insubstantiality."[5] The Victorian woman was "removed from the power-wielding occupations of the world [...] yet relegated to the higher realm of moral influence."[6] The ghostly trappings of the supernatural formed a symbolic language through which women could convey the female experience of domestic confinement, staging a complex negotiation between repression and resistance.

Another figure often relegated to a position of liminality in the domestic sphere is the servant. At once a member of, but also an outsider to, the family, the servant roams around the house in a ghostly manner, situated between the visible life of the family, and the invisible labour that sustains it. The liminal figure of the servant speaks not only to the gender-based divisions of the domestic and public sphere, but also to the existing tensions between the middle and working classes.

In England during the mid-nineteenth century, there was a strong revival of social paternalism–a phenomenon that was viewed as the best solution for confronting the destabilizing shift of social demographics at the time. It is based on the belief that "dependents (women, servants, tenants) are like children, in need of the wise guidance of a benevolent father."[7] As a nostalgic ideal, paternalism longs for a world in which social roles remain clearly defined, purporting that "every individual is obligated to serve the social order [...] in different or preordained ways depending upon their social position."[8] By seeking to temper the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies, paternalism reinforces the role of the Angel in the house, who–caught

between two opposing positions– is both oppressed as a woman, and oppressor as a member of the middle-class. The figure of the ghost resonates more closely with the servant, who is often portrayed as a source of corruption, particularly of children. The servants' access to private information about their masters incentivised efforts to paint the servant class as dishonest. Servants thereby became "essential characters for examining the tensions produced by social transformation and conflicting values."[9]

The paternalistic outlook of the Victorian time period maintained a widespread assumption that writing was a "properly masculine activity."[10] Women, however, have long been foundational to the ghost story form as it allowed female writers special kinds of freedom to explore fears of powerlessness and visibility. The short story form is especially suited for articulating such anxieties, as the very *shortness* of the story has the advantage of making it more believable, whereas a novel must sustain the supernatural premise at the risk of breaking the reader's suspension. The short story is also commonly associated with marginalized writers, who use it to "express something suppressed/ repressed in mainstream literature."[11] The ghost story deals precisely with the return of the repressed, invoking grievances of the past as a haunting presence in the present. Literary critic Karl Miller argues that "the ghost stories of the modern world declare themselves the testimony of the overworked," referring, above all, to the servants of domestic service.[12] Servants were expected not just to abide by their terms of employment, but to cherish their subservient role in the house with gratitude for their master, who took on the role of a loving caretaker.[13] This paternalising treatment of the servantry created a domestic sphere that was neither comforting nor familiar, setting the ultimate scene for a ghost story.

There are two notable Victorian ghost stories that use servant characters to speak to the condition of women's lives in the Victorian time period: Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Old Nurse's Story* (1852) and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Gaskell demonstrates a preference for detail over abstraction, whereas James favours ambiguity in his storytelling. Taken together, Gaskell's insistence on specificity and James's strategic abstraction illuminate the paradox of the Victorian woman's liminal condition: simultaneously central to the functioning of the household, yet marginalized within rigid social hierarchies.

Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Old Nurse's Story* (1852) is a short story framed as a narrative from the perspective of a nurse-maid, telling a group of children about the time their mother, Miss Rosamund, became an orphan and came into her care. The old nurse went with the young girl to go live with her great aunt at Furnivall Manor, a house which they soon discover is haunted. Organ music echoes throughout the halls, a

spectral child appears on the snow-covered grounds, and the rigid old Miss Furnivall grows increasingly distressed. As the hauntings intensify, the nurse learns of a long-buried family scandal involving pride, jealousy, and a betrayal between sisters— sins that have all returned in ghostly form to remind them of their past misdoings. The story culminates with a confrontation between Miss Furnivall and her dead older sister, who froze to death along with her infant daughter after being banished from their home years before–a tragic fate that the nurse saves her charge Rosamund from meeting.

In her short story, Gaskell demonstrates a preference for detail over abstraction. Her short story form emphasises concrete particularities, a habit of mind that Sara Ruddick argues developed as a result of the necessary attention mothers showed to their children.[14] Gaskell interestingly makes all the characters see the ghosts, making it seem as if they really do exist. Dickens, as editor of the magazine in which the story was originally published, wanted a stronger element of ambiguity, and wrote a series of letters to Gaskell asking her to change the ending. She replied adamantly insisting that Miss Furnivall must be *visibly* confronted by her guilt for the role she had in her sister's death. Dickens wrote back simply saying "nous verrons," a French phrase which translates to "we will see," a condescension both intended to soothe and assert his authority over her.[15] Dickens pressed Gaskell to write for him and called her his "Scheherazade" because her narrative powers could "never be exhausted in a single night, but must be good for at least a thousand nights and one."[16] Writing became a means for Gaskell to negotiate her place beyond the domestic sphere, which could at times feel like a prison, but "could also be, within its limits, a field for autonomous action."[17]

The domestic sphere condemns women to persist in stasis; a condition of sameness that is retained even in death. Although Miller argues that by setting ghost stories in the past its terrors remain confined to its history, the return of the dead demands purgatory, otherwise there could be no theologically legitimate explanation for ghosts.[18] This recalls the idea that "the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children."[19] In *The Old Nurse's Story*, Lord Furnivall, who "was eaten up with pride," raised his daughters to be just like him, claiming that "no one was good enough to wed them."[20] By denying their right to self-determination, the Lord imposed a condition of invisibility on his daughters, which is counteracted by an equivocal desire for materiality and possession. In one sense, literary production is itself material. Gaskell writes with this in mind as "most of her plots are constructed to highlight the abuse or fallibility of authority."[21] A passage near the ending, where the nurse holds the child "tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt"[22] not only demonstrates this

desire to possess, but also strikingly foreshadows events in Henry James's tale.

The Turn of the Screw is a framed narrative by Henry James that tells the story of a young governess who was hired to take care of a bachelor's orphaned niece and nephew in their remote country house. After a series of bizarre incidents, she becomes convinced that the house is haunted by the ghosts of two former servants and grows increasingly desperate to protect the children from their corrupting influences. From the outset, however, her testimony seems designed to arouse suspicion. The governess is described as "a fluttered, anxious girl," who harps on "the state of [her] nerves," warning the reader/listener of "[her] dreadful liability to impressions."[23] Her authority is further undermined by 10 year-old Miles, who repeatedly addresses her as "dear," a diminutive that patronises her role. Miller notes that "James's text, no less than Shakespeare's, contemplates a need to explain the supernatural in terms of human frailty, whose name in certain contexts [...] is woman."[24] James himself described the novella as "an amusette to catch those not easily caught," implying that to read it as anything more substantial would require accepting the literal existence of ghosts.[25] At the end, the governess speaks of possessing Miles, calling him "my own," as she "launched at the beast" before seizing him in her arms, only for his "little heart, dispossessed," to stop.[26] Miles's final cry as that of "a creature hurled over an abyss" renders the moment both dramatic and highly ambiguous. The governess's desire to possess the child is implicitly tied to her unspoken attachment to their absent uncle, her master whose approval she seems to seek throughout the story.

In writing his novella, Henry James displays an interest in the work of his predecessors. Seeing as "books are 'made' not of ink and paper, but of other books," the uncanny resemblance between Jame's narrative and Gaskell's T*he Old Nurse's Story* can be understood as one text returning to haunt another.[27] Such imitations are especially striking given the gendered dimensions of nineteenth century literary production. Women writers overall suffer a more basic "anxiety of authorship" because for a woman to write at all may be perceived as an act of deviancy from the ideals of Victorian womanhood.[28] Many therefore adopted pseudonyms to secure greater literary freedom. Gaskell herself wrote under a different name for a number of years, which perhaps encouraged a more devout style of writing. She notes that her male correspondents gave little details as it was seen as "beneath the dignity of man."[29] James indeed favours abstraction and narrative ambiguity as a strategy that both heightens suspense and absolves the author of committing to any definitive belief.[30]

Taken together, *The Old Nurse's Story* and *The Turn of the Screw*

demonstrate how Victorian ghost stories articulate conditions of power and powerlessness through figures that have been rendered invisible in the domestic sphere. Women and servants alike inhabit positions of liminality, remaining indispensable to the function and upkeep of the household, yet denied any authority, autonomy, or social recognition for the role that they play. The ghost corresponds with this condition because it is ontologically indeterminate; neither fully present nor absent, but existing in a state of "in-betweenness," which is precisely what lent Victorian women and servants their power. Gaskell's ghost stories are not only intended to frighten, but to mourn the enforced invisibility of women. Her insistence on detail resists the cultural forces that rendered them invisible. The ghostly figures in *The Old Nurse's Story* do not hover at the edge of perception, but return with purpose, demanding recognition and moral reckoning. Gaskell's recurring image of the house as a grave recalls an older theological metaphor–that of the resurrection of the soul. According to Christian doctrine, "coming out of the tomb" is interpreted as "escaping from the world."[31] For Tertullian, the imagery of the tomb is dual: it is the literal grave, but also represents the corrupted world state, from which the resurrection grants liberation.

By contrast, James's narrative ambiguity becomes a means by which to absolve himself of responsibility, refusing to commit to a certain belief about the state of the world. He contends that all fiction ought to demonstrate subtlety, rather than tell overtly, because strong opinions were seen as reprehensible. With this in mind, "the doctrine of 'separate spheres,' which assigned reason to men and love to women, was a denial of full humanity to both."[32] Where Gaskell exposes the abuses of paternalistic power through revelation, James stages the dangers of female authority in a system that offers women no legitimate outlet for power at all. Ghost stories, then, render visible what is not acknowledged. Whether through Gaskell's concrete specificity or James's unsettling abstraction, the supernatural speaks to the condition of women, and of lives lived in-between what is socially recognised. In giving voice to the unseen, Victorian ghost stories do not merely tell of a haunting past; they expose the fragile foundations upon which ideals of domestic order and gendered power were built.

Techne

oil, acrylic, and acrylic resin on wood

DOMINIQUE CROWLEY

M.Phil. in Digital Arts and Intermedia Practices



Virtual Reality & Maternal Healthcare:

A Case for Inclusive Research & Design

DANNA DEKAY

M.Phil. in Screen Studies

A technology typically associated with male-dominated gaming might be women's newest ally. Millions of pregnant women face pain, isolation, and anxiety during prenatal care and childbirth. Virtual Reality (VR) is quietly revolutionising this. VR technology stands at a crossroads between its current identity as a male-dominated gaming and entertainment tool and its potential as an inclusive tool for healthcare innovation. Typically, VR computer-generated software is shown through head-mounted displays (HMDs). These headsets properly provide immersive and interactive experiences, allowing us to use computers and digital technology for human experiences, such as social rituals, virtual conversations, art creation, and much more. Although male perspectives largely shape VR development priorities, new research highlights a positive shift for women. Emerging applications of VR in university and hospital settings are challenging this previously male dominated field of research, foregrounding, instead, VR's ability to serve diverse populations and address a broader range of human needs, especially those of pregnant women. How can VR benefit pregnant women during prenatal care and childbirth, and what does this relationship reveal about the importance of including women in VR innovation?

According to Marcus Carter and Ben Egliston, "going beyond the fantastic and critically understanding the underlying affordances of VR will be necessary in understanding how and where it might make the most difference."[1] Inclusive design practices begin with specific applications, but VR's role in maternal healthcare is a genuine stepping stone toward transforming it from an exclusionary technology into one that serves various social groups effectively.

Oftentimes, women are excluded "both in the design of VR hardware and in the virtual worlds we're asked to inhabit when we use VR."[2] One reason for this is

because companies simply do not see women as users of this technology.[3] Men also make up the majority of leadership behind VR innovation and hardware/software design processes.[4] Regarding the hardware, it is designed for male body types. For example, the adjustable interpupillary distance (IPD) in most headsets is better suited for male faces than female faces.[5] The mean male IPD is 64.67mm, while the mean female proportion is 62.31mm. The headsets are designed to fit much closer to the mean male.[6] Headsets on the market today such as the Samsung Gear VR, Oculus VR devices, and the HTC Vive do not accommodate the proper interpupillary distance range. The Sony PlayStation headset is one of the only devices that does[7]. Furthermore, VR accessories such as haptic jackets are too large to work on women's bodies. Even eye-tracking systems fail if the user wears mascara.[8] Because of these discrepancies, VR can cause motion sickness more easily for women. The only way to reduce cybersickness rates is to redesign headsets with a wider adjustable IPD range.

Pushing for more inclusive research within virtual reality software and hardware is crucial because VR is changing the way people operate. From career training to gaming, augmented guidance, and everything in between, women are stuck on the sidelines as VR advances without them. How can women fully benefit from VR technologies when their hardware and software are not designed with women's needs and experiences in mind?

Current research is challenging this act of marginalization. Aforementioned, the Sony PlayStation headset has a proper IPD range for women. Even if VR companies assume their audiences are only gaming men, this hardware change is possible and necessary. Companies need proof that there is a market for female-oriented VR hardware. Researchers, designers and scientists are proving this to be the case. Melissa Wong, a doctor and maternal-fetal medicine specialist, claims that "laboring women are a vulnerable population looking for complementary and alternative pain management options."[9] While studies demonstrate VR's benefits for expectant mothers, these findings rarely inform how companies approach gender inclusive design. The same medium criticised for exclusionary practices could become a powerful tool for women's health, if the industry were to prioritize this research.

It is common for mothers to experience mental health struggles during the perinatal period, with growing evidence that it continues past the first year of the child.[10] However, many expectant mothers are determined to avoid taking medication that could cause fetal and neonatal risk[11]. VR can step in as an alternative: A study conducted

from 2019 to 2024 proved that nature scenes and therapeutic content through VR resulted in a positive impact on reducing anxiety and depression levels among participants.[12] The article also found that nature scenes, specifically with lots of green spaces, increased happiness. Furthermore, the VR provided mothers with images of their fetus, which resulted in an increase of attachment between the two.[13] Therefore, studying VR is a promising option for managing perinatal mental health by offering emotional relief during such a critical period in a woman's life.[14]

Apart from emotional relief, research also shows that VR can also help with physical pain, especially for early labor. A 2019 study discovered that ten minutes of VR during early labor reduced participants' thoughts on pain by 43%, and their worst pain intensity by 21%. Women's ratings of pain decreased by 34% when using VR.[15] Technology companies, universities, and hospitals are leveraging this new research in countless inspirational ways. The University Hospital of Wales in 2019 used the Samsung Gear Generation 2 for VR scenescapes. The headsets were provided by Rescape, and the company is collaborating with multiple British maternity units on how to continue providing the technology to more mothers.[16] Rescape's VR scenes of peaceful beaches, northern lights, buffalos, and walks on mars all helped mothers relax and take their mind off the pain of early labor. Some scenes included calming voiceovers, mindfulness exercises, and virtual doulas. This resource is especially crucial in locations where doulas aren't included in health insurance.

More and more hospitals are providing women with the headset or goggles, in hopes that it will take their pain away. One woman, Aviva Lahamy, at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, relaxed with the visuals of a blooming tree. Her experience included a woman's voice, and the blooming movement of the tree coincided with her breathing patterns. Lahamy shared that her pain dropped from a 7 to a 3.[17] Many of the mothers at Cedars-Sinai use VR to help with pain, because they chose not to use pain medication during labor. Across the hospital's studies, both heart rates and levels of pain lowered.[18] The content used at this specific hospital was created by Applied VR. The company's mission is: "Reimagining medicine with a new reality of accessible immersive therapeutics."[19]

However, VR usage in hospitals is not only providing scenescapes, but virtual tours of maternity services. VR-based therapy can provide positive, experiential exposure to what the delivery process looks like. This exposure helped to answer questions and concerns parents had about labor, and diverted new moms' attention from stressful thoughts.[20] One mother who participated in the study said she would recommend this educational VR experience to other new moms.[21] In 2018, the National Health Service

Trust in the UK created a virtual tour for expecting mothers. This experiential learning included a tour of the birth centre, labor ward, and a look inside the operating room; even a caesarean procedure was filmed at the Fatima Allen Birth Centre for mothers who might endure that process.

One key feature of this VR experience is allowing new mothers to understand how they might interact with doctors and midwives during labor. The video content and headsets were provided by the Hull Institute of Learning and Simulation Team. During the year of its release, 130 parents were tested. 94% of them stated they felt much better about birth and labor after engaging with the content.[22] It properly immerses patients by using two images for each eye to mimic how humans naturally see.

Similarly, a Nordic insurance company called Gjensidige Insurance filmed a full 360 degree VR childbirth titled "Birthual Reality."[23] It was recorded at the Örebo University Hospital in Sweden, and even includes over the shoulder angles before and after delivery. This educational video, along with the Google cardboard headset, is available at all major Swedish maternity clinics for parents. This VR creation provides ample insight into labor preparation and reduces discomfort and stress for new parents.[24] And, most importantly, none of these studies reported experienced cybersickness. Each study used HMDs that work well with the average female IPD.

However, there are limitations to consider. First, the practical implementation of VR in healthcare settings raises questions about accessibility and funding. The research on the topic thus far has been conducted exclusively in high-income countries, where access to VR technology is readily available. Similarly, most practical applications took place in European countries with universal healthcare systems. In countries whose healthcare system could not provide for the application of VR in hospitals, the following questions arise: Would technology companies be open to donating headsets? Or would hospitals be willing to pay for them? Another significant limitation noted is that this existing research focuses on mothers without clinically diagnosed anxiety or depression. VR therapy might differ for those with more severe symptoms.[25]

Moving forward, to ensure these VR experiences will not cause motion sickness to expecting mothers, hospitals must use HMDs with adjustable IPD ranges of 50 to 70mm.[26] Since these headsets already exist and data on women's experiences with virtual reality is publicly available, manufacturers and technology companies merely have to consider the available material. This development may endow women with a sense of agency; the hospital Cedars-Sinai specifically stated that they feel

confident and comfortable using VR as a tool for mothers, because they can change their mind whenever they please. In the future, as these pratices become more widespread, VR for maternal healthcare could become more affordable and accessible through a collaboration of VR companies and hospitals.[27]

While the research here focuses on pregnant women, it is essential to recognize that these women are one segment of a broader target audience for VR applications. Understanding VR's impact on maternal healthcare lays the foundation for exploring how this technology might assist diverse groups of patients in hospitals worldwide. It is a segue into how digital art and virtual reality technology can support people of all genders, ages, and abilities in achieving better emotional and physical well-being. VR is reducing pain, alleviating anxiety, and equipping parents with tools once unimaginable in a clinical setting. The growing partnerships between researchers, clinicians, and developers suggest its potential is far from exhausted.

Higher Education in the Age of AI

the editors:
YEBO CHIPOFYA
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M.Phil. in Comparative Literature

Artificial intelligence is a catch-all term for a broad range of different tools and functionalities, but a common definition runs like this: "Artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy."[1] This distinction between simulation and reality, particularly in the case of generative AI—the text-image-video-content generating models which are affecting universities and work places most—brings up two central questions. One concerns the capabilities of generative AI (What is lost between the 'simulated' product and the 'real' one?) and the other is whether the value of education, and even labor, lies in the product at all, or if the focus is being erroneously shifted away from the humans who are supposed to benefit. Students are currently more worried than ever about the precarious states of their future professional careers. Incessant articles on increasing AI-skill requirements and shrinking entry-level positions appear to put into question the entire purpose of even pursuing a costly university degree.[2] At the same time, last year over half of 16-29 year olds in Ireland used generative AI for school or college work.[3] At Trinity College Dublin, guidelines on the usage of generative AI vary from degree to degree and no one seems to have any definitive answers. In some fields, new degree programs centered around AI are being created, while others are staunchly dedicated to preventing the normalization of generative AI.[4] Amidst all the clatter and noise, we decided to speak with some professors and lecturers at TCD to hear their opinions on the matter.

Professor Taha Yasseri, Workday Chair and a professor of Technology and Society at TCD and TUD, is broadly optimistic about the futures of graduates:

"Technological change has always created uncertainty, but it has historically tended to transform work rather than simply eliminate

it. While some tasks and professions will undoubtedly change, new roles, skills, and opportunities are also likely to emerge. Generative AI should therefore be seen less as a replacement for human expertise and more as a tool that can complement creativity, analysis, and problem-solving. For current and future postgraduate students, adaptability, curiosity, and strong disciplinary foundations will remain extremely valuable. At the same time, one important concern is inequality. The benefits of new technologies are rarely distributed evenly, and there is a real risk that some individuals or communities may have greater access, resources, or institutional support than others. Ensuring that AI is used in ways that widen opportunity rather than deepen existing divides will be one of the key challenges for universities and society more broadly."

Dr. James Hadley, an associate professor in Russian and Slavonic Studies, specializes in literary translation. He works in a field that has seen much change and weathered various challenges in the past century, and he feels AI will be no different:

"People observing the translation industry have been predicting the imminent demise of the human translator since at least 1954, when a computer was first able to translate 60 highly curated sentences from Russian to English. At the time, it seemed as if the work of human translators was already under threat, and people were widely predicting that within 5 or 10 years, the work would be done entirely by machines. However, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, there are more human translators than there have ever been in history, albeit, their work is substantively different from that of their twentieth century predecessors.

I suspect the industry will change substantially over the next 10 years. But I think the two ends of the binary which are most often discussed: that machines will take over entirely, or that they will not be used at all, are both caricatures, and the truth will lie somewhere between the two. I think the people who ride the wave of change will be those who are flexible and open-minded. So I would advise people emerging in translation now to experiment with skills which may feel a bit wrong if they have only learnt to translate the way their teacher says. I would advise them to remember there are no translation police and experimentation is healthy. [...] The main thing that concerns me about discussions of AI in the context of education is the number of people who have very strong views about it, even though their understanding of AI is highly limited. AI is currently in the early-mid stages of a hype cycle, meaning that society is currently grappling with whether AI is the solution to everything or the end of everything. Eventually, we will emerge from this cycle and generative AI will most likely find its place, while something else will take the focus of attention.It is understandable that educators are concerned by

generative AI's existence, because it forces the educators to do things in ways they are not used to doing them. Change is difficult. But it is inevitable, and it's also normally for the best in the end."

Dr. Harun Siljak, assistant professor in Electronic and Electrical Engineering, highlights the disjoint between the objects of the AI industry and those of educational institutions:

"The nature of the AI market, especially in the current era of generative AI and large language models, is to offer solutions for problems that are not necessarily there. In the educational context, this requires creating a perception that the central issue of education is that of productivity. Instead of thinking, learning, practicing or mastering, the onus shifts to artefacts of those processes. Means and ends are confused, and the artefact as a proxy measure of underlying understanding and learning shifts from proxy to 'the thing itself', and the degree becomes a sequence of artefacts. In such a setting, students' ability to think critically and independently is in the way of [a] wide uncritical adoption of AI, and hence remains under a sustained attack. Replacing practicing and mastering a skill which constitutes a significant learning outcome of a programme with a deceivingly productive automated system is a major link in rapidly accelerated deskilling of the workforce—deskilled in college, the workforce remains shackled to the deskill-machinery in their professional and private life. The myth of AI productivity is not accelerating mastery, it is accelerating production of something that looks like a result of student work, an ersatz."

Dr. Siljak is also very aware that the pressure surrounding the adoption of AI technology is not only targeting students, but educators as well:

"The other day, Irish Independent had an article titled "'Teachers who use AI will replace those who don't,' Oireachtas committee chair warns." There is a dangerous idea that this pervasive technology is here to stay and that not adopting it means that time for personal life and "more important things" will suffer by virtue of everyone moving on very fast."

Dr. Katja Bruisch, an energy and environmental historian, is critical of the idea that the integration of AI into all areas is inevitable and that students have no choice but to acquiesce:

"AI is not inevitable. If there is one thing we can say about AI with certainty, it is that it reaffirms the value of embodied human thinking with all the meandering, openness and hard work it involves. Don't be fooled. Getting used to using AI tools won't make your professional futures any more predictable, but embracing refusal may afford you with a sense of agency and purpose that the AI industry deliberately wants to take from you. One of the

most powerful things that could happen is students joining forces to speak up against the AI hype in the university. Every grain of sand you throw into the machine is worth it."

Dr. Bruisch has many ethical concerns when it comes to AI technologies, but particularly worrying is their extractive nature:

"Around the world, AI is responsible for [the] rapidly increasing electricity demand used to power data centers. Ireland is highly dependent on energy imports, and because of the country's continued reliance on fossil fuels, we have serious grounds to expect increasing energy prices in the not-too-distant future. In this context, it is bewildering to see that more than 20% of the country's entire electricity production is already used by data centers, and that this number is projected to grow. Allowing data centers to swallow up what little progress has been made in decarbonization, while making households and data centers compete for electricity, cannot be justified environmentally and is politically extremely dangerous."

As artificial intelligence develops and changes, students will continue to navigate the issues touched upon by these academics, but what is evident in all these conversations is that the emergence of generative AI stresses rather than undermines the value of pursuing higher education.

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