



The Scattered Pelican

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The Scattered Pelican is committed to a comparative approach that embraces pluralism and inhabits the spaces or aporias of/in/between/ among discourses, ideologies, or methods of criticism; playfulness as a leveling perspective that resists the privileging of certain objects of study based on origins, genres, forms, or media; and an active and conscious pursuit of scholarship that enlarges the space of the discipline of comparative literature through deep engagement with a broad range of objects of study, novel applications of critical theory, and primary texts in their original languages.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

It is with great pleasure that the Editorial Team of The Scattered Pelican brings to you the summer issue of 2020-2021. We would like to start by thanking Prof. James Miller, the Graduate Chair of the Comparative Literature Program, for his tremendous support to complete publishing this issue. We were in dire need of a professional web designer who can create and format the e-copy of this issue along with taking care of the technical and aesthetic aspects of the journal website. We genuinely appreciate Prof. Miller's support for allowing us to outsource this crucial task and providing us with the necessary departmental funds to proceed. Also, we would like to thank Sylvia Kontra, Graduate Program Assistant, and Dawn Gingrich, our Administrative Assistant, for their help during these uncertain times.

We would not be able to publish this issue without our authors, and we are so thankful for their commitment to submit their manuscripts and their ability to thrive despite the challenging conditions of the pandemic. Your cooperation and responsiveness were superb, and we thank you for all your hard work. We are deeply indebted to our peer-reviewers, and the time and effort they have put into this issue. We appreciate the soundness of your observations and the breadth of your perspectives to nurture the development of this issue.

Christian Yalgan, the founder of The Scattered Pelican, has generously agreed to continue collaborating with the Journal as a copy editor, and I am so thankful for his endless support. I would like to express my appreciation for all the efforts that the Editorial Board members put in to bring up this issue to its final fruition. Without them, the Journal would not be able to continue publishing.

This issue engages with diverse modes of cultural and intellectual interpretations as it includes a wide range of topics that cross the boundaries

established between literature, art, philosophy, and linguistics. We are delighted to publish two authored articles that have been presented during the Annual Graduate Conference in the Comparative Literature Program titled “Camp/ camp” for the academic year 2020-2021. This conference fostered a broad umbrella for multidisciplinary collaborations from young scholars in Canada and abroad to provide their critical insights in the area of Camp. This issue also navigates through a variety of zones like queer theory, visual arts, memory studies, biblical adaptations, and postcolonial theories. We are also pleased to publish one book review in Spanish and two other book reviews in philosophy and literary theory which enriches the scope of our journal.

Let me close by saying that *The Scattered Pelican* will remain committed to its primary mission which is expanding the readership of comparative literature and its interdisciplinary innovations. I hope you will enjoy the new material on the pages of this issue. Thank you for your belief in *The Scattered Pelican*!

Laila Zaitoun, *Western University*
Editor-in-Chief

GLAMOUR AND DECAY:
*HOLLYWOOD BABYLON, WHAT EVER HAPPENED
TO BABY JANE?* AND THE AESTHETICS OF
QUEER DECADENCE ON FILM

Patrick Woodstock, *University of Toronto (Cinema Studies Institute)*

INTRODUCTION

In his often-cited book *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (1979), Richard Gilman expresses an anxiety that this titular term “has been debased into a label” as it has entered the popular vernacular, losing any meaning it once held as it is applied to a wide range of phenomena: “We indulge in such random and inappropriate usages with ‘decadence’ these days, applying it [...] to eating habits, interior decoration, styles of dress, and of course many crepuscular sexual practices and tastes” (16-17). While Gilman ultimately suggests that this word should be abandoned altogether, subsequent scholarship on decadence has responded to his prescriptivist anxiety with a drive towards specificity, locating decadence within the historical and cultural context of late 19th and early 20th century Europe.

Understood within this context, decadence—connoting both a specific aesthetic sensibility in art and literature as well as the perceived decay of society at large—articulates a profound ambivalence towards the promises of progress and development offered by the nascent cultures of modernism and modernity: “[in decadence,] progress has stopped and afterward supplies the tense of imaginative interest and value. This antagonism speaks for long submerged but always growing apprehensions about the value of novelty[,] progress [...,] and futurity” (Sherry 29-30). Eschewing Gilman’s dismissal of decadence as a catch-all for decline, this historical contextualization lends the term meaning as a substantive rebuttal of modernity that offers the grotesque and macabre in place of futurity.

Understandably, this effort to rehabilitate decadence by understanding it in relation to European modernity at the turn of the 20th century has itself led scholars such as David Weir to be hesitant about applying this term to

other historical contexts. Weir ends his account of the history of the decadent tradition in America by suggesting that this word cannot be usefully applied outside of the *fin-de-siècle* context which gives it meaning: “We can only be nostalgic for that vanished age when depravity and corruption actually meant something [...] Today, of course, America offers no shortage of depravity, corruption, excess, and possibly even perversion, but never decadence: it is too late for that” (201).

Given that Weir’s understanding of decadence is based on its status as a precursor to early 20th century literary modernism, it seems reasonable to suggest that any attempt to locate decadence outside of this historical context risks superficiality. However, it would be fallacious to dismiss the possibility of locating decadence within media such as cinema, whose historical development does not correspond to that of literature.

As such, this essay turns to the decline of classical Hollywood in the 1960s to argue that decadence can offer a meaningful theoretical framework to understand the intersection of decay, queer identity, and so-called ‘deviance’ in circumstances other than the European *fin-de-siècle*. To make this argument, this essay focuses on works that dramatize this decline, including Kenneth Anger’s infamous, largely fabricated gossip collection *Hollywood Babylon* (1975) and the film *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (Robert Aldrich, 1962). While these texts have long been associated with the aesthetics of camp, this essay offers an alternative interpretation through the lens of decadence.

The first section of this essay details the ways in which camp and decadence are often conflated with one another before going on to distinguish them as independent analytical frameworks by contrasting the emphasis of camp on reinvention with the focus on decay in decadence. It then proposes that this fundamental difference offers two divergent understandings of history, as well as radically different conceptions of the possibility of queer subjectivity. Ultimately, by differentiating camp from decadence, this essay attempts to foster a more nuanced historical genealogy of queer representation and to forward a potential framework to usefully situate feelings of alienation and loneliness within this history.

DECADENCE AND CAMP

As suggested by Phillip Stephan, the aesthetic of decadence relies

heavily upon the hierarchies of taste and morality that predate its emergence during late 19th and early 20th century modernity: “Decadent thinkers accepted Rousseau’s idea that nature is good and civilization bad, yet they enthusiastically preferred the artificial: such perverse enjoyment of what is thought to be evil characterizes decadence” (19). The choice of decadent thinkers and artists to actively celebrate what is conventionally ruled as ‘evil’ is central to the movement’s alignment with the historical project of queer survival, especially given that this aesthetic emerges alongside the “invention of homosexuality in its modern form out of the sexological, medical, and criminal discourses of the late nineteenth century” (Love 2). As same-sex attraction is rearticulated as a marker of incomplete or improper development during this period, the embrace of the supposedly immoral and deviant within decadence serves to undermine the authority of these discourses.

If decadence relies upon transgressing while nonetheless maintaining the discourses and hierarchies by which queerness is marginalized, the subversion of camp operates in precisely the opposite way. Instead of upholding these cultural structures of power, camp dissolves them completely by inviting a (prototypically) queer spectator to wrest the images of popular culture away from their original contexts as an act of postmodern democratization. In her “Notes on Camp”, Susan Sontag highlights this disregard for underlying cultural structures as one of the key differences between camp and the era of decadence which precedes it:

The dandy was overbred [...] He sought rare sensations, undefiled by mass appreciation (Models: Des Esseintes in Huysmans’s *À Rebours*, Marius the Epicurean, Valéry’s *Monsieur Teste*). The connoisseur of Camp has found more ingenious pleasures [...] Mere use does not defile the objects of his pleasure, since he learns to possess them in a unique way (289).

As Sontag conceives of “dandyism” (which, given her citation here of three canonical decadent novels, can be easily aligned with the aesthetic of decadence) as founded on an exclusionary, aristocratic ‘good taste’, camp emerges as a democratizing disavowal of taste altogether.

While the democratization in camp diverges from the ethos of flagrant transgression in decadence, the ultimate effect is no less political as

noted by Richard Dyer: “What I value about camp is that it is precisely a weapon against the mystique surrounding art, royalty, and masculinity [;...] it demystifies by playing up the artifice by means of which such things as these retain their hold on the majority of the population” (52). Thus, camp serves a similar purpose as decadence within a different set of historical circumstances: as a tool of queer survival amidst an inhospitable dominant culture, including both the pre-Stonewall erasure of queer sexuality and the violent homophobia and transphobia that followed post-Stonewall visibility.

Despite their opposing strategies, the fact that camp and decadence perform similar functions at different points of time leads most critical accounts to understand these aesthetic sensibilities as historically separate but functionally interchangeable. For example, Weir ends his history of the decadent tradition with a suggestion that 20th century camp is little more than a “dissipated” copy of *fin-de-siècle* decadence, using Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” to highlight this continuity: “[Sontag’s essay], dedicated to Oscar Wilde, makes abundantly clear that the sensibility she describes descends in large measure from *fin-de-siècle* decadence [...] but at the same time, this new dissipated decadence cannot quite replace the [...] original” (201). Here, Weir only mentions camp briefly and dismissively, ignoring any functional difference between it and decadence. The critical literature surrounding camp often exhibits this same tendency to conflate these two terms, as when Andrew Ross refers to the “nineteenth century camp intellectual” as “prodecadence” (317), or when Linda Mizejewski takes Sally Bowles’s famous proclamation (“Divine decadence, darling!”) as the starting point for a historical narrative of camp (4). Even as the respective critical literatures of camp and decadence point to a clear historical and theoretical distinction between these two terms, there is a common tendency to view one in terms of the other: to see decadence as an earlier version of camp, or camp as an echo of decadence.

The broad terms by which decadence tends to be treated within critical accounts of camp can be partially attributed to the traditional exclusion of decadence from literary and cultural histories. Recently, Vincent Sherry has examined the processes through which decadence has largely been written out of scholarly accounts of modernity and modernism. Sherry highlights the ways in which this controversial sensibility has been renamed and transmuted into a number of other movements (most notably *symbolisme* in France):

“For reasons that range from the political to the moral, [literary critics and historians] elaborate and in fact radicalize the difference, turning *symbolisme* into the better angel of [decadence,] its erstwhile twin, its increasingly disapproved double” (9). He goes on to note that one of the “moral” reasons for this omission is the close association between decadence and queer forms of identity.

Beyond allowing for a more nuanced historical account of the origins of literary modernism, the revisitation of decadence as a distinct aesthetic sensibility enables an embrace of negativity within queer cultural history, along the lines of that suggested by Heather Love in her description of early modern queer texts: “Texts that insist on social negativity [...] describe what it is like to bear a ‘disqualified’ identity, which at times can simply mean living with injury—not fixing it” (4). Within this context, the finality, dissipation, and fragmentation which mark the aesthetic of decadence can be understood as a mediation on the contentious relationship between queerness and the rationalizing discourses of modernity.

As such, decadence should not be understood as a mere precursor of camp, but instead as a distinct albeit linked sensibility. In fact, the sobering melancholy with which Love associates these texts provides a possible solution to one of the primary problematics of camp: the tendency towards flippancy and irony: “Camp seems often unable to discriminate between those things that need to be treated for laughs and style, and those that are genuinely serious and important” (Dyer 59-60). By opening a historical space for a melancholic affect, decadence addresses a distinct set of concerns from camp, as it foregrounds the alienation underneath the latter’s joyous, artificial surfaces.

DECADENCE, CAMP, AND HOLLYWOOD HISTORY

One respect in which the distance between camp and decadence is especially apparent is their divergent understandings of the relationship between the present and the past. In his account of camp, Andrew Ross conceives of this relationship in terms of disposal, recovery, and labour: “[F]or the camp liberator, as with the high modernist, history’s waste matter becomes all too available as a ‘ragbag’ [...] Camp, in this respect is more than just a remembrance of things past, it is the *re-creation of surplus value from forgotten forms of labor*” (320). Ross articulates this capacity for reinvention through the

film *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*. This film, which casts Joan Crawford and Bette Davis as ex-movie star sisters whose jealousy of each other turns murderous, ends with a scene in which the titular Jane (Davis) deliriously re-enacts her childhood vaudeville act on a beach shortly after killing her sister. Ross takes this moment, as Jane performs her “blithe child-star routine [...] surrounded by an oblivious group of teenagers”, as a metaphor for the moment when classical Hollywood stars are no longer able to “produce and dominate cultural meanings” (311-312). The teenagers watching Jane, who are unaware of her past as a vaudeville child star, instead write over her: enacting a “redefinition” of Jane “according to contemporary modes of taste” (Ross 312). Following Ross’ account, camp enables the decline and fall of classical Hollywood to be understood as a generative moment: as the onus of labour shifts away from those within the system and towards its spectators, they rediscover and reinvent its discarded cultural objects.

José Esteban Muñoz suggests the political and temporal logic of this camp reinvention in his account of queer utopia. He notes that, as camp reinscribes cultural objects that have lost their relevance for a younger audience, it “resituates the past in service of politics and aesthetics that often critique the present” (163). In this sense, camp is closely related to Muñoz’s overall project of conceptualizing queerness as “an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (1). In other words, camp rewrites the past in order to create a more hospitable present and a possible future for queer individuals, along the lines of Dyer’s conceptualization of camp as a tool of queer survival: “All the images and words of the society express and confirm the rightness of heterosexuality. Camp is the one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man” (49).

Meanwhile, decadence progresses towards the exact opposite end, as it exaggerates the decay of the past to suggest the instability of the present and the impossibility of any kind of futurity. One text that exemplifies the fading temporality of decadence is Kenneth Anger’s *Hollywood Babylon*. At first glance, this text seems to be engaged in the acts of rediscovery and redefinition that define camp. Like *Baby Jane*, Anger’s text appears towards the end of the classical Hollywood era and purports to mourn this system’s passing while simultaneously rehabilitating its aesthetics and iconography for a new, younger audience.

The book's form embodies an excessive productivity, as it takes elements of Hollywood's past (specifically, the scandals and mysterious deaths surrounding its notable personalities) and spins a wide-ranging web of speculation, florid description, and outright fabrication around these oft-scant fragments of history. While *Hollywood Babylon* thus fits Ross's description of camp as it rewrites discarded cultural objects, this model cannot account for Anger's consistent focus on classical Hollywood's self-destructiveness and the impossibility of its future. This tendency is exemplified by the final image of the book: "They have restored the Hollywood sign, just the first nine letters [...]. New generations at Hollywood High are not even aware that the monolith on Mount Lee ever spelled anything more than the name of the smog-shrouded town which lies below" (288). While camp promises the continued viability of discarded cultural objects through rediscovery and reinvention, Anger's decadent reimagination of Hollywood iconography instead offers an endless sifting through of the past and a present permanently marked by loss.

The denial of futurity that defines *Hollywood Babylon* is foundational to the decadent tradition as a whole, as highlighted by Charles Bernheimer in his analysis of Gustave Flaubert's *Salammô* (1862). As Flaubert reaches back towards the Mercenary Revolt in Ancient Carthage after the First Punic War, his novel mirrors Anger's much later work as it provides an intricate re-imagination of history with an emphasis on detailed, grotesque descriptions of sexuality and violence. In this way, it presents what Bernheimer understands as a fundamentally decadent understanding of history, marked by a "taste for the bizarre debris of history at the expense of any vision of historical causality and evolution" (41). Unlike Anger's book, *Salammô* is meticulously sourced and fact-checked with then-available historical materials. Bernheimer suggests that this preoccupation for detail and ornamentation comes to take the place of any sense of progression or futurity: "Flaubert feels himself to be at the end [...] but he associates this ending not with a poverty of history, but with its excess [...] History for Flaubert is no more than its objects and exists nowhere else than in its objects" (42-43). Ultimately, *Salammô* and *Hollywood Babylon* share this decadent understanding of history, as they gesture towards an ornate and decaying past to suggest the dissipation of their own present and the impossibility of a future.

The resulting difference between decadence and camp can be further

articulated through another reading of the final scene of *Baby Jane*. Much of the film focuses on the efforts of Bette Davis's Jane to stage a comeback for her vaudeville act, attempting—like Norma Desmond before her—to re-embody her previous self while ignoring the massive shifts in culture that have occurred since the height of her fame: “[Jane] is a figure arrested *in time* [...] oblivious to the fact that she is no longer in the limelight, [she] continues to act as if she were” (Brooks 236). Jane only attains this visibility at the end of the film as she dances for a crowd of teenagers after murdering her sister: what Ross describes as the moment when she ceases to be able to write herself and is consequently written over by a younger public. However, even as these final scenes mark Jane's passage into camp, they also necessarily suggest her loss of agency over her own image. When understood from Jane's perspective rather than that of her spectators, this moment marks the final impossibility of her comeback: a denial of futurity that aligns the film with the aesthetics of decadence.

Far from interchangeable, camp and decadence offer distinct understandings of the relationship between the past and the present. As a form of irony, camp enables queer spectators in the present to efface cultural objects of their original history and context and remake them in their own image. Meanwhile, decadence emphasizes the outdated nature of such cultural objects to foreground a sense of decay and finality. If Ross describes camp as the “re-creation of surplus value from forgotten forms of labour”, then the decadence exemplified by *Hollywood Babylon* and *Baby Jane* represents *surplus labour without value*, as they laboriously and intricately recreate a past with no future (320).

DECADENCE, CAMP, AND SUBJECTIVITY

The fatalistic and negative nature of decadence begs the question of why a return to this sensibility is worthwhile. This question is especially pertinent given the ambiguous politics of this aesthetic which, while carving out an essential space for queer subjectivity amidst the hostile environment of modernity, also serve as a vessel for anti-progressive and anti-feminist resentment. Elaine Showalter highlights the contradictory and often hostile place of women within decadent literature in her analysis of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). She focuses on the suicide of Sybil Vane, the

novel's main female character: "Women, as Lord Henry explains to Dorian, are not capable of noble and intellectual love; they are too fleshy and material [...] They can re-enter the 'sphere of art' only by killing themselves and becoming beautiful objects" (176). While it would be inaccurate and problematic to suggest that the novel's portrayal of same-sex desire necessitates a hostility towards women, it is undoubtedly true that the ambiguity and negativity of decadence is often predicated on the removal of female subjectivity and the transformation of women into objects, monsters, or dead bodies.

This tendency for decadence to sideline female-identified subjectivity recalls a common critique of the camp aesthetic. As noted by Pamela Robertson Wojcik, camp scholarship commonly assumes that women are the objects of camp redefinition, while only rarely positioning them as the agents of this reinvention: "Most people who have written about camp assume that [...] women are camp but do not knowingly produce themselves as camp [...] Women, by this logic, are objects of camp and subject to it, but are not camp subjects" (5). Here, Wojcik summarizes how camp is often imagined as a way to create a (queer) male subjectivity at the expense of women. While Robertson goes on to detail the various ways in which female-identified subjects have appropriated masculinity to create their own queered subjectivity, her account reveals a fundamental difference between decadence and camp. What is at issue in both a traditional, male-oriented account of camp—as well as in Robertson's response to it—is the *creation* of subjectivity, while what decadence offers is subjectivity's *destruction*.

While a feminist reclamation of decadence would be impossible, rereading a film like *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* as an object of decadence rather than camp reveals the potential value of its negativity and hopelessness to a project of queer history. Instead of camp's familiar model of gender parody wherein conventional norms of masculinity and femininity are destabilized through exaggeration, *Baby Jane* focuses its attention on the anguish that results from the unattainability of these norms. As such, this film fits comfortably within what Heather Love describes as the "turn towards the negative" in historical accounts of queer representation, which deemphasizes reinvention and resilience to instead focus on the lived experience of the "social, psychic, and corporeal effects of homophobia" (2).

This emphasis on the lived experience of disappointment and

frustration is most apparent at certain points in *Baby Jane* when its characters are forced to confront the irreconcilability of their nostalgia for childhood with their lived reality. Midway through the film, Jane finds herself drawn into a nostalgic reverie for her years as a vaudeville star and begins to repeat a childish rhyme. Upon speaking the words “Now I wish that you would tell me, because I’m much too young to know”, she catches a glimpse of her adult body in the mirror, prompting a horrified scream that implies the violence with which she has been pulled out of her fantasy.

Even though *Baby Jane* does not explicitly include any form of queer sexuality within its text, Jane’s experience of alienation at her own image resonates with a long history of queer shame and isolation. Heather Love explores this history through Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness*, which follows the story of upper-class woman Stephen Gordon as she realizes and explores her lesbian identity (or potential transmasculinity). While this work is among the first to explicitly chronicle what was then termed ‘sexual inversion’, Love notes that it remains particularly controversial for its intense evocation of negativity: “The novel’s association with internalized homophobia, erotic failure, and a stigmatizing discourse of gender inversion has allowed to function as a synecdoche for the worst of life before Stonewall” (101). Given the irreconcilability of Hall’s novel with any historical project of queer pride, Love understands it as a cultural artifact of a painful lineage of suppression and a “representation of loneliness as a queer structure of feeling” (104). By mapping the experience of loneliness and alienation onto the historical experience of queerness, Hall’s novel offers a means to queer ostensibly straight texts that evoke these feelings, such as *Baby Jane*.

Furthermore, the scene of Jane’s traumatic self-spectatorship described above recalls an almost identical scene in Hall’s novel, as described by Love:

Stephen’s confrontation with her image proves to be intensely alienating. Unlike the child in Lacan’s mirror scene, Stephen does not see an image that is ideal or complete but rather one that is at odds with her desired self-image [...]. At once lacking and too complete or self-sufficient, this ‘desolate body’ exists for Stephen as an object of pity rather than admiration (115).

Here, Gordon is alienated not only from her own image, but from the supposedly universal process of identity formation outlined by psychoanalysis.

In his account of the mirror phase, Lacan ties the moment in which a fragmented, incomplete subject sees an image of themselves as an idealized whole to a linear conception of time and a teleological understanding of identity formation: “[T]he mirror stage is a drama [progressing] from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject [produces] fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to [...] its totality” (Lacan 78). By suggesting the total unattainability of this ideal self, *Baby Jane* and *The Well of Loneliness* suggest an unsettled, queer relationship to temporality; in both narratives, the mirror serves to reveal the incoherence of identity rather than serving as an agent of its coalescence.

Ultimately, these narratives bring the backward, futureless understanding of history in decadence (as explored above) down to the level of lived experience of queer individuals. As such, they reveal the indispensability and political potential of these uncomfortable texts, pointing to the impossibility of a future built upon the exclusionary, heterosexist norms of modernity.

CONCLUSION

While the bodies of literature surrounding camp and decadence tend to conflate these two terms, they offer two distinct approaches towards history and subjectivity. As camp foregrounds the redefinition of past cultural objects for the present, it represents an effort to create a more hospitable present and a utopian future for queer individuals. Meanwhile, decadence erodes the possibility of a future at all as it emphasizes the overwhelming, unmanageable excess of history. Furthermore, while scholarly accounts of camp emphasize its usefulness in allowing queer individuals to establish their subjectivity, decadence extends its sense of a dissolving present towards the incoherence of identity as a whole. Ultimately, recognizing decadence as an independent aesthetic sensibility rather than an earlier form of camp offers a framework to resituate the negative feelings of alienation and loneliness into the history of queer representation in popular culture.

Rather than existing *only* as an archive of images to inspire queer cultural production in the present, decadent texts like *Baby Jane* and *Hollywood Babylon* also serve as historical artifacts of the contentious relationship between

queerness and the processes of modernity. Instead of mapping a way towards a better future, these works register the isolation and alienation that marked the past, and as such, provide the historical understanding necessary to better contextualize these feelings in the present.

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HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR TESTIMONY: RECOUNTING THE PAST AND FRAMING THE FUTURE THROUGH LITERATURE, FILM, AND VIRTUAL REALITY

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In telling the individual experiences of the Holocaust, different artistic mediums have been used as tools to preserve the memories of the past and to record the testimony of those who survived. In particular, literary texts—among other narrative and visual media such as film, theatre, art, photography, etc.—have been used by survivors of the Holocaust to share their experiences and teach us, the contemporary and future generations, not to repeat the past. There are countless memoirs, historical fictions, autobiographies, biographies, etc., from survivors who have shared their story. For example, we can think of Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), published just two years after the end of WWII; Polish survivor Tadeusz Borowski's collection of short stories, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1959); and Ruth Kluger's memoir *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (1992), to name a few. In the visual field, there are countless documentaries such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1987), a nine-hour film presenting the testimony of survivors, bystanders and perpetrators; films like Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) that are based on true stories; and various examples of historical fiction. Innovative digital projects are also now giving the remaining survivors a new medium through which they can share their testimony and preserve their memory for the future. USC Shoah Foundation's *Dimensions in Testimony* (2012), for example, is a digital project that provides interactive conversations with pre-recorded video images of survivors, allowing audiences to have one-on-one interactions with digital versions of the survivors. *The Last Goodbye* (2017), the first-ever Holocaust VR experience that I discuss in this article, is another example. With these new technologies and virtual reality (VR) in particular, audiences

are able to immerse themselves in the individual stories of survivors and to engage affectively with the memories of the Holocaust.

Taking into account the different mediums used to tell an individual's story of survival, I examine the use of VR in sharing Holocaust testimony, considering specifically how the medium used to frame the testimony contributes to the meaning being produced as well as the affective response of the audience. In particular, the focus will be on two different stories: the VR experience *The Last Goodbye* (2017), co-directed by Gabo Arora and Ari Palitz, which takes the user on a virtual tour of the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland, alongside survivor Pinchas Gutter; and Peter Weiss' autobiographical short story, "Meine Ortschaft" ("My Place") (1965), which documents his visit to Auschwitz twenty years after the war¹. In examining these two case studies, I also reference other digital projects and films to analyze how each medium allows the creation of different memories of the Holocaust to emerge, while engaging with audiences affectively.

With technology being ingrained in our everyday lives, VR—the latest technological advancement in video games and entertainment—has now also become an educational and memory tool to preserve Holocaust survivor testimonies and teach new generations about the Shoah. In this article, VR is understood to be a new medium through which stories can be told. Similar to film, VR relies on the visual elements of the medium in order to immerse the user into the world created by the VR experience². Compared to film, VR provides a more immersive experience as it engages several of the user's senses, including vision, hearing, touch, and even smell, as Joe Bardi discusses in "What is Virtual Reality? [Definition and Examples]" (2019). In this article, I use the term VR experience rather than VR film to distinguish the level of immersion, interactivity, and affective responses between the two mediums³. It is important to note, however, that different VR experiences can provide diverse levels of user interactivity; in some cases, the user might be able to make choices within the diegesis, while the experience is more limited in others like in *The Last Goodbye*. In addition, although there are some similarities with video games in regard to interactivity and user engagement, it is important to understand that VR cannot be equated with videogames, in particular when dealing with sensitive topics such as the Holocaust⁴.

VR has become an innovative narrative form of storytelling,

particularly in Holocaust education and commemoration, with survivors embracing this new technology to tell their stories and preserve their memories for the future. The narrative element of VR, similar to those of literature or film, allows us to compare this form of storytelling to other more traditional narrative mediums. In Marie-Laure Ryan's article "Immersion vs. Interactivity: Virtual Reality and Literary Theory" (1999), the author compares VR and the literary text according to their interactivity and immersion. Ryan's analysis of VR in comparison to the literary text helps us understand how the two mediums are connected. On one hand, Ryan argues that VR enhances some of the aspects already present in the literary text including audience affective response; on the other, VR also helps revitalize the concept of interactivity in literary theory (111-112). With Ryan's work, we can further understand some of the similarities between the literary text and VR as part of the narrative genre and the continued interest to compare these two forms of storytelling.

Furthering the comparative analysis in their article "Towards a Narrative Theory of Virtual Reality" (2003), Ruth Aylett and Sandy Louchart argue that VR "must be considered a particular narrative medium alongside Theatre, Literature or Cinema" (2). They contend that VR, "through its interactivity and other particularities, presents characteristics that none of the previously mentioned narrative forms usually possess", and thus should be considered a narrative form alongside them (2). In addition, media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin highlight "the ways that Virtual Reality has incorporated elements and aspects of other previous media forms" (qtd. in Bucher 5) in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). Considering these perspectives, I position myself alongside Ryan, Aylett, Louchart, Bolter and Grusin, who place VR in a comparative framework with the literary text. In particular, I am interested in furthering our understanding of VR in relation to other narrative forms such as literature or film, and how each medium shapes the stories being told and the affective response of the audience. In examining VR in relation to literature, we can discuss how immersion and interactivity work in each medium to provide the audience with different affective responses.

Pinchas Gutter's endeavour to tell his story of survival through multiple mediums speaks to how different mediums can shape both the Holocaust testimony being presented and audience's affective responses. As

Stephen Smith notes in the introduction to Gutter's memoir *Memories in Focus (Holocaust Survivor Memoirs)* (2018), "Pinchas Gutter has told his story in many different ways over a twenty-year period" (7). His range of testimonies include speaking on camera to give a four-hour interview about his life for the USC Shoah Foundation's historical video archive, making multiple documentaries, answering "1,500 questions about his life to become the first-ever interactive interviewee as a part of USC Shoah Foundation's New Dimensions in Testimony program" (7), and also becoming "the first Holocaust survivor to tell his story in full room-scale Virtual Reality" (8) with *The Last Goodbye*. Through Gutter's multimedia testimony archive, we can reflect on how he utilizes the affordances of each different medium to share his story, with each framing his testimony differently⁵. In the first chapter of his book, *Understanding Media* (1964), Marshall McLuhan argues that "the medium is the message" (7). Here McLuhan is referencing how technology has changed our understanding of the world, with the medium used to deliver such technology-shaping and controlling "the scale and form of human association and action" (9). In applying McLuhan's understanding of the medium transforming the message to the context of Holocaust memory, we see how the medium used to deliver Gutter's testimony shapes the content being represented. As Ayllet and Louchart further explain:

A story is not told or shown in the same way according to the medium in which it is displayed, nor is its content or its intensity the same. The very different nature of media means that a narrative has either to be told or shown in different ways, varying the intensity of different aspects or parts of the content in order to achieve a satisfying effect on the person(s) to whom the narrative is communicated or displayed (2).

Each medium can thus provide a different perspective to the audience and communicate a different story, with the creators or authors utilizing the medium to their advantage. For example, *The Last Goodbye* utilizes visual and auditory techniques to immerse the user in the virtual space of present day Majdanek; while Weiss' "My Place" utilizes different literary devices to evoke a similar experience for the reader about his visit to Auschwitz. In both cases, the message—the testimony of these two survivors—will be shaped by the

medium.

What can the medium of VR do differently than literature or even film? How can it shape Gutter's testimony? As a visual storytelling medium, VR enables users to be fully immersed in the virtual environment and experience the 3D world through their senses. *The Last Goodbye*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2017 and as of September 18, 2020 is available for home download through the Oculus platform, places the user in close proximity to Gutter throughout the experience⁶. The user is immersed in the virtual environment of present-day Majdanek, where Gutter's family was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. As Gutter takes the user through the Majdanek State Museum—the changing rooms, barracks, crematorium—and memorial, they are fully immersed in this virtual space and experience Gutter's testimony through their senses. VR's capability of fully immersing users in the virtual environment, enables the survivor to tell their story more affectively and transports the users into the place of trauma. As Gutter explains in an interview with Michelle Boston, “[i]t cannot be left to academics and historians to try and cut it up and then give their subjective view of what actually happened” (qtd. in Boston). In this case, the VR medium allows the user to be brought into Gutter's story: to experience alongside him his recollections of how he lost his parents and sister⁷.

The user's ability to be present virtually in Majdanek with Pinchas Gutter is one of the innovations that VR has brought to the storytelling form, and particularly to the genre of Holocaust testimony. The user's full immersion in this virtual world distinguishes the VR experience from film. As Maria Zalewska argues in “*The Last Goodbye (2017): Virtualizing Witness Testimonies of the Holocaust*”,

While the head-mounted display enables viewers to see a 360-degrees panorama of Majdanek, the room scale design paradigm allows them to virtually walk and co-inhabit the space of the camp alongside Pinchas. The 360-degree tracking system translates viewers' real life movements into their movements within the virtual world experienced on screen. In other words, we can walk alongside Pinchas, we can move around the barracks, crematoria, or walk up intimately close to tall cages filled with thousands of shoes of the victims that are displayed in barrack 52 (49).

Although we can compare similar features in VR and film such as the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, music, and oral narrative, it is the sensory immersion—such as the ability to walk alongside the survivor and in some cases even interact with him—that distinguishes VR from film and allows the subject the use of this medium to tell their story differently than through the cinematic format. In *The Last Goodbye*, the user's ability to walk alongside Gutter and explore the museum through their virtual presence distinguishes the VR experience from a documentary film. For instance, compared to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), which also takes the viewers on a 'tour' of several of the Nazi concentration camps including Treblinka and Auschwitz-Birkenau where survivors share their testimony *in situ*, viewers cannot immerse themselves in the environment and walk alongside Landsman and the survivors, unlike in *The Last Goodbye*. Although the film viewer is still actively engaged in the experience, the level of immersion is different. As Zalewska argues in relation to the *The Last Goodbye*, "[t]he goal of the creators was to involve audience's corporeal bodies in a mediated interaction with the virtualized space of the camp that can create strong affective experiences" (49). Full immersion then can be considered one of the characteristics of VR that changes how the testimony is framed and also experienced affectively by the audience⁸.

However, this begs the question: can immersion also be experienced through literature and film? I contend that the answer is yes but not to the same extent. We can examine this response with Peter Weiss' autobiographical short story, "My Place." The German-Jewish author, painter, and playwright, who survived the Holocaust in exile in England and later in Czechoslovakia and Sweden (Cohen XIII), centers his story on his visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum on December 13, 1964: a visit Weiss describes as "twenty years too late" (Weiss 145) as he did not experience the camps during the war. Similar to what *The Last Goodbye* accomplishes through the use of VR in terms of fully immersing the user in the virtual world of the Majdanek State Museum in the present, the short story places the reader alongside Weiss on his tour of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Alain Resnais' film *Night and Fog* (1956), which features a script written by Holocaust survivor Jean Cayrol and is narrated by Michel Bouquet, follows a similar format. The film takes the

viewer through the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek concentration camps, documenting their emptiness in the present, while intercutting black and white archival footage of the camps during the war. In choosing the literary format, however, Weiss cannot rely on the visual elements characteristic of film to immerse the reader into the former camp as he sees it in the present; Resnais, in contrast, is able to switch between coloured and black and white footage to indicate the two temporalities. Instead, Weiss employs the use of spatial vocabulary and overly descriptive imagery to describe painstakingly every inch of Auschwitz and Birkenau, thus evoking a visual representation of the 1964 landscape as well as of the fully operational Auschwitz-Birkenau camp during WWII.

To anchor the reader in the present, Weiss overly describes every part of the former camp; for example, noting the decay of the railway platform in Birkenau: “Grass grows between the ties. Grass grows in the broken stone of the platform” (149); and emphasizing the emptiness of the present: “Nothing remains but the total senselessness of their death” (150). As Weiss focuses on the emptiness, the decay, and every inch of the buildings, railways, crematoria, etc., he also conjures the past: “I see before me the image of the women and children who camp there, one woman holds an infant to her breast, and in the background a group advances toward the underground chambers” (149). In contrasting the emptiness of the present with the presence of the suffering of the victims in the past, Weiss immerses the reader in both temporalities and provides a visual representation of this world of pain, suffering, and death. Every detail serves to create a visual image of the space in the reader’s imagination, although not in the same manner as with film or VR. For the reader to feel immersed in the world created by literary text, reader must use their imagination “to translate the signs into a represent” (Ryan 133), while “[i]n VR, the sense of immersion is given by image, sound, and tactile sensations” (133). With Weiss’s testimony, it is left to the reader’s imagination to create the visual representation of the environment. Weiss even uses his own imagination to “see” the camp as it was during the war. Thus, although Weiss still evokes a visualization of the camp and creates a visceral and emotional effect on the reader, it is distinct from the visually rendered emotion and immersion that the viewer experiences in a film, and more so in a VR experience. Here, the medium used to depict Weiss’ story again influences how readers receive his

testimony as they experience the tour of the Auschwitz Memorial Museum that Weiss depicts.

Another element that changes how the testimony is framed in each medium is the level of interactivity and participation from the audience. For some scholars such as Ayllet and Louchart, VR provides an ‘active’ narrative where the viewer is considered a user, meaning that they interact and are actively participating “in the building of the resulting experience”; as opposed to the ‘passive’ spectator of literature, cinema, and traditional modes of theatre (3). However, scholars following phenomenological approaches to literature do not consider the reader as ‘passive’ as Ayllet and Louchart argue, but rather as ‘active’ participants similar to the VR users. As Richard Gerrig argues in *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (1993), readers actively participate in the fictional world of the literary text “like an actor on the stage [using] their own experience of the world to bridge gaps in the text ... [giving] substance to the psychological life of characters [like] actors performing roles” (17). Although Gerrig is referencing fiction in particular, the reader’s participation can apply to non-fictional texts as well from a phenomenological perspective⁹. I position myself alongside such phenomenological scholars who understand readers as active participants¹⁰. In the case of “My Place,” the reader participates in the meaning-making of the text, experiencing with Weiss the coldness of the space, the memory of the victims’ suffering, and the author’s own testimony recounting his guilt for having survived without experiencing the camps firsthand. Furthermore, although this is not always the case, I argue that for Weiss’ text, the first-person perspective further allows the reader to become more actively engaged in the meaning-making process¹¹.

In the case of VR, the level of user participation or interactivity is diverse. On one end of the spectrum, there is for example what John Bucher describes in *Storytelling for Virtual Reality* (2018) as the “ghost-in-the-scene”, where the user only observes what is being presented in the VR experience. On the other end, there is the more interactive approach where the user can make changes in the diegesis and become the protagonist of the narrative (71). In the case of *The Last Goodbye*, the limited interactivity makes the VR experience more similar to that of a film, with the advantage of allowing the user to feel fully immersed in Gutter’s testimony through the use of their senses¹². With regard

to user interactivity, we can consider how this project uses the medium of VR as a visual experience that complements the narrative story, as opposed to a VR experience that gives the user more freedom with the interactive components. *Anne Frank House VR* (2018), which allows users to visit the secret annex where Anne Frank and her family hid for two years during WWII, is another VR experience that engages with Holocaust testimony. This experience, which is available for home download for the Oculus Rift and Oculus Go, allows the user to have a greater level of interactivity than *The Last Goodbye*. The users can visit the secret annex either in story mode or in tour mode, the latter allowing them to explore the space on their own and grab objects such as Anne's diary for closer inspection. In both cases, I argue that user interactivity is not the main objective of the VR experiences but rather the full room-scale immersion that allows the user to be fully present in the virtual space being depicted. From this perspective, VR accomplishes something different than film and literature as it allows the user to feel as though they are part of the story and be emotionally connected to the subject and space. As Zalewska argues: "[t]he prevalent rationale behind educational uses of this VR experience is its promise of immersion through seemingly indexical moments of audience's contact with places where historical events, like the Holocaust, happened" (50). This can be seen particularly in *The Last Goodbye*, with Gutter taking the user through different parts of the museum and filling the space with his raw emotions throughout the tour. In these instances, the viewer cannot help but feel a deep connection with Gutter and be fully immersed in his testimony both viscerally and emotionally. By allowing the user proximity to Gutter and immersion through tactile, visual, and auditory experiences, the medium frames the testimony and provides a new way of engaging with the individual stories and memories of the Holocaust.

In conclusion, the mediums used to depict the testimonies of Holocaust survivors shape the stories being told, with VR presenting one form of storytelling where the users are able to immerse themselves fully in the story and in the virtual space of trauma. In this article, I presented a comparative analysis of two different Holocaust testimonies alongside other mediums to examine how the medium changes the testimony and influences the affective response of the audience. I analyzed Peter Weiss' autobiographical short-story "My Place" and Gabo Arora and Ari Palitz's *The Last Goodbye*, the first-

ever Holocaust survivor VR experience, which tells Pinchas Gutter's story of suffering, loss, and survival. In examining how VR, literature, and film provide different forms of immersion and interactivity, I have explored some of the ways in which these mediums allow the audience to participate in the narrative and create the feeling of being immersed in the story. Although both "My Place" and *The Last Goodbye* place the user/reader in two different experiences of visiting the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, the mediums they utilize allow for different experiences to emerge. What we can take from this analysis is how in allowing the user to be immersed in the world of the text or virtual space, different perspectives, testimonies, and thus memories of the past, can be preserved.

NOTES

1. In this article, I will use Karen Jackiw's English translation (1973) of Peter Weiss' "Meine Ortschaft." I will reference the text by its English title, "My Place."

2. User is the common name for an audience member that engages with virtual reality, although scholars have reservations in using this term. See for example, footnote vi of Mandy Rose's "Technologies of seeing and technologies of corporeality: Currents in nonfiction virtual reality" (2018).

3. It is also important to point out that interactivity is not unique to VR. Films also engage with the audience and evoke different levels of interactivity. For further details on Deleuze's philosophical understanding of cinema see *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985) by Gilles Deleuze.

4. For a discussion on the representation of the Holocaust in games, see Ernst van Alphen's article "Playing the Holocaust and Playing with the Holocaust" in *'Holocaust'-Fiktion* (2015).

5. For further details on some of Gutter's testimonies and their differences see "*The Last Goodbye* (2017): Virtualizing Witness Testimonies of the Holocaust" (2020) by Maria Zalewska.

6. The VR film was also exhibited for a limited time at the Museum of the Holocaust in Los Angeles, California; the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A

Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York City, New York; the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center in Skokie, Illinois; and The Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida (“USC”).

7. From a technological perspective, this sensory experience is created through the use of volumetric capture technologies, which allows “the digital rendering of three-dimensional environments and living things” (Rose 10) as Mandy Rose argues in “Technologies of Seeing and Technologies of Corporeality: Currents in Nonfiction Virtual Reality” (2018). The digital 3D rendering of the Majdanek State Museum mimics the real museum and creates the perception in the user of being present with Gutter in this space of trauma.

8. In examining the role of VR in Holocaust memorialization, Zalewska also notes that the user’s empathetic response to the Holocaust, as a result of being able to feel part of the experience, is one of the problematics of VR. She argues: “This technological deterministic assertion [VR’s potential to make us more compassionate, empathetic, and connected] has been questioned by many scholars, including Grant Bollmer, who argues that ‘technologies designed to foster empathy presume to acknowledge the experience of another, but inherently cannot. The user of these technologies, instead of acknowledging another’s experience, hastily absorbs the other’s experience into their own experience’ (51).

9. Marie-Laure Ryan furthers this argument claiming that “[e]ven with traditional types of narrative and expository texts—texts that strive toward global coherence and a smooth sequential development—reading is never a passive experience” (125).

10. The reader’s active participation can also be seen for example with Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*) (1963). This experimental novel, considered a hypertext novel, allows the readers to interact with the text, making them active participants in deciphering the plot and message of the story. The reader can take different paths to read the novel, either following the text linearly—that is, reading each chapter in chronological order—or as the author encourages us: to read the chapters in a non-sequential order, jumping instead to different chapters as indicated throughout the novel.

11. For further details on narrative point of view (POV) and the concept of focalization, see Mieke Bal and Jane E. Lewin’s “The Narrating and the Focalizing: A Theory of the Agents in Narrative” (1983).

12. Viewer participation in cinema is also understood as active, a concept Gilles Deleuze has developed in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985). Teresa Rizzo in *Deleuze and Film: A Feminist Introduction* (2012) furthers Deleuze's understanding of cinema as being "intrinsically tied to thought and modes of thinking" (1), further explaining that "[a]s a form of art based on automated movement, rather than still or frozen pictures, cinema has the potential to provoke us into thinking in inventive modes" (2). Viewer participation has been further amplified in the past few years with the revival of the "interactive film." This genre, which first premiered with the 'Kinoautomat' in 1967 (Hales 378) as Chris Hales indicates in "Audience Interaction in the Cinema: An Evolving Experience" (2010), is similar to some VR experiences as it allows viewers to participate in the film's unfolding of events to change the outcome. *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt: Kimmy vs. The Reverend* (2020), and *Animals on the Loose: A You vs. Wild Movie* (2021) starring Bear Grylls, are just a few examples of these recent interactive films. Although they do not engage with the memory of the Holocaust, they do help us understand how this medium might also be used in the future.

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THE RED TENT: A BOOK CLUB FAVORITE BASED ON GENESIS 34

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the adaptation of the biblical story of Dinah from Genesis 34 into Anita Diamant's popular novel *The Red Tent* (1997). The methodology consists of close readings of excerpts from the hypertext to evince their connections with the Bible and identify how the novel expands and reshapes the original story by incorporating a contemporary view on the lives of the characters. As a result, this study highlights the evolution of Dinah from a silent passive character to the contemporary narrator of a saga filled with feminist undertones created by Diamant. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the rewriting challenges the values of the original text by assuming a female perspective, suggesting a communal female experience as a mode of reading the material and embracing generic elements from the romance novel.

Keywords: Book of Genesis; Anita Diamant; rewriting; Dinah; contemporary fiction; women from the Bible

INTRODUCTION

Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, is a biblical character whose brief story has generated interest in various fields such as theology, feminism, and literature. In Genesis 34, she is the center of a violent episode that involves her defilement in the hands of Shechem, a Canaanite prince, and the bloody revenge executed by her brothers Simeon and Levi in the name of "her honor". In its biblical context, the primary purpose of this story is to emphasize the political tensions between the Israelites and the Shechemites as part of the overarching narrative of the Old Testament: the ulterior consolidation of the kingdom of Israel. As it is currently known, the legal notion of rape as a sexual offense perpetrated against the integrity of an individual was not developed

in biblical times. For these reasons, even though Dinah is a central character in this passage, the story does not delve into her thoughts or emotions. Dinah does not have lines of dialogue and her agency is minimal: a narrative attitude present in other biblical episodes where sexual violence occurs. For example, in Judges 19-21, the victim—identified as the concubine of a Levite man—is raped until she collapses. As in the case of Dinah, the story does not provide any insight into the psychological or emotional implications for the victim, but it quickly marks the beginning of the war against the tribe of Benjamin. In these stories, the sexual violence against women functions as a narrative device to motivate the actions of men and explain their political schemes or projects. However, the modern reader might be interested in the concealed lives of these women. Utilizing the conventions of historical fiction and romantic fantasy, Anita Diamant offers a retelling of part of the book of Genesis from the point of view of Dinah in the contemporary novel *The Red Tent* (1997). The general purpose of this study consists of demonstrating how the narrative frame provided by the Bible can be employed to rewrite the original text and produce a secular literary work that takes distance from the male characters and their political endeavors in order to imagine the lives of women in biblical times.

From a theological viewpoint, the passage of Dinah has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Joy A. Schroeder explains that this biblical text was used allegorically by medieval Christian commentators to “demonstrate what happens when a person, especially a woman, sins through pride, foolishness, or curiosity. Shechem’s assault on Dinah was viewed as a result of and a punishment for Dinah’s sin” (775). This interpretation penalizes women when their behavior does not agree with societal norms and pays little attention to the conduct of the Canaanite prince, who in contemporary terms would be considered a rapist. Eventually, interpretations that are more sensitive towards the situation of Dinah emerged. For example, Luther rejects the medieval idea that Dinah consented or enjoyed the attack while also showing sympathy for her. While the medieval commentator Bernard draws a parallel between Dinah and Satan, Luther associates evil with Shechem (Schroeder 791). However, according to Schroeder, the point of view assumed by Luther in his lectures is Jacob’s, a grieving father talking about his defiled daughter. The emotions and thoughts of Dinah remain concealed and the modern reader might feel the need to explore them yet again.

Feminist readings of Dinah's story emerge as a response to traditional hermeneutics. Opposing the readings that lead to the acceptance of Dinah's silence as a product of a distinct socio-historical background, feminist criticism proposes interpretations in which this silence motivates a deeper reflection on gender and justice. For example, Caroline Blyth examines the passive role of this character and draws the following conclusion:

Dinah is denied the chance to tell her story to her community; it is up to the community of those who read and hear this story then to give her space to speak, to listen to her pain, and, hopefully, to let her heal. Recognising the silencing of rape survivors, refusing to let it continue unchallenged, is a task that is as imperative within contemporary culture as it is within the field of Biblical Studies (505-6).

Naomi Segal argues that the presentation of the events in the Bible highlights cultural practices related to marriage in ancient Israel that deserve criticism: "Dinah is an object of exchange so blank that to violate her is to enter nothing but instead to 'take' something—from whom? not from her. The text is singularly clear in exposing the discursive economics of male sexuality, with its exchange of object-females among subject-males" (qtd. in Parry 40). Moreover, Robin Parry expresses significant concern about how the biblical narrator ignores the central character: "Perhaps more worrying seems to be the clear androcentrism of a story which, although it involves the rape of a woman, is all about men and their reactions" (41). These ideas suggest the problem of a story with a central female character whose emotions and thoughts regarding a critical event remain a mystery for the reader. The lack of Dinah's perspective is problematic because the contemporary reader does not share the same views that dominated the original text; therefore, the passiveness of the rape victim and the way her story instantly becomes a plot of male politics might seem insensitive and leave a sense of incompleteness: a void.

The rewriting of a biblical story into a secular text often implies a shift from its original purpose to the set of values of a different time and audience. Gérard Genette introduces the term "transvaluation" to explain how the values reflected in the hypotext can differ from the ones conveyed through the hypertext. He explains that the process of transvaluation leads to changes

in the point of view, understood not in a narratological “technical sense” but in a “thematic and axiological” one (368). Anita Diamant’s novel *The Red Tent* is an example of this transtextual approach to the stories of Jacob in the book of Genesis.

In her novel, Diamant presents Dinah as the narrator of her family’s adventures and her own story. The biblical character finds the basis for her narration in the tales transmitted by women from one generation to another. Dinah relies on her childhood memories, her observations and experiences. However, the change is not only narratological. By offering a depiction of the house of Jacob from the perspective of Dinah, the themes and values in the story also change. Diamant explores the female microcosms that coexisted as a marginal, overlooked, private, and alternate space opposed to the public sphere of men. Fiction propels human imagination to rewrite the biblical story in a way that incorporates elements from the romance novel genre that are deeply attached to traditional constructions of femininity. Likewise, the rewriting brings to literary life affective components and cultural expectations associated with the preferences of many contemporary female consumers of popular fiction. For example, it foregrounds moments in which the main characters joke and enjoy each other’s company, conveying a tender feeling of female camaraderie that moves the novel from its biblical roots and brings it closer to the tone of successful books about women such as Rebecca Wells’ *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. In this manner, Diamant’s novel covers themes and values that satisfy the interest of a contemporary audience intrigued by the dramatic potential of Dinah and the other women from the house of Jacob: Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah.

Ilene Cooper, employing a playful tone in a brief review, informs about the impact of *The Red Tent* in the production of subsequent biblical fiction:

[S]ince the runaway success of Anita Diamant’s *The Red Tent* in 1997, there has been another run on the biblical bank: heroines rescued from the paternalistic milieu of scripture and given new life in a quasi-feminist context [...] Yes, biblical scholars are likely to dismiss these feminist interpretations as woefully speculative, but don’t tell that to millions of satisfied *The Red Tent* readers (Cooper 1134).

The Red Tent is notable for its ability to engage a large audience, propose a rewriting of the biblical text through a female perspective, and generate an affective experience that evokes reading pleasures generally associated with women. With these considerations, the following sections of this article are: “In the Land of Women”, an analysis of the construction of the female microcosms that suggests a mode of reading experience; and “Kisses of His Mouth”, a study of the generic conventions that Diamant embraces from romance novels. Throughout these sections, I seek to explore how the hypertext mirrors values different from those consolidated in the hypotext.

IN THE LAND OF WOMEN

There are several works connected to the story of Dinah and each one reflects the values of a particular historical and social context. One such example is the play (*comedia*) *El Robo de Dina* by Lope De Vega from 17th century Spanish theater. Matthew D. Stroud notices the depiction of women as “objects to be protected, sold, or stolen” (233) in the play. Stroud also argues that Lope’s work “provides considerable insight into how seventeenth-century Spain viewed the Bible, the history of the Jewish people, the relationships between men and women, and even the *comedia* and Baroque ideals” (233). Meanwhile, Thomas Mann retells the book of Genesis in his emblematic work *Joseph and His Brothers*, where he devotes a section to the episode of Dinah. According to Vladimir Tumanov (2007), the purpose of Mann’s work was to “reaffirm the humanistic values of Enlightenment in the face of Nazi barbarity sweeping across Germany and Europe in the 1930s and 1940s” (149). In the same way that Lope’s and Mann’s retellings utilize the biblical material to expose the values of their times, Anita Diamant’s novel *The Red Tent* confers Dinah the role of the narrator. It foregrounds women’s lives in a way that resonates with contemporary values regarding the depiction of women, their sexuality, and their agency.

Anita Diamant’s novel emphasizes the communal bond that Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilha—all of whom are daughters of Laban and wives of Jacob—form before Dinah’s eyes, breaking away from the predominantly androcentric perspective in the original narration. For example, the first menstruation of Rachel is an important event that marks her transition from

a girl to a woman with the immediate implication of becoming Jacob's bride. This event takes place as one of the many moments that Diamant utilizes to convey female solidarity in the novel:

Rachel bled her first blood, and cried with relief. Adah, Leah, and Zilpah sang the piercing, throaty song that announces births, deaths, and women's ripening (29).

Similarly, the book evokes an environment of cooperation among women during Leah's labor. The four sisters Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah participate in this scene accompanied by Adah, their mother, and Inna, the midwife (47). Here is a point in which Laban takes Ruti, a younger woman, to bear sons for him. He cruelly abuses her. She bears two sons, but the abuse continues through the years. When Ruti finds out that she is pregnant again, she asks for help. The book depicts a secret abortion that becomes a compelling act of female compassion: "They watched from the far side of the red tent, where cakes and wine sat untouched, as Rachel mixed a black herbal brew, which Ruti drank in silence" (78).

These passages show the importance of the red tent as a space of mutual empathy where women share vital experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy, and labour, while also finding support in moments of pain and distress. This place symbolizes the private nature of female interactions, with women portrayed as resourceful individuals able to form productive associations. The representation of this space populated by women is particularly important when considering that the story takes place when the spheres of action of men and women were mostly separate. Although Jacob is monotheist, the book shows that women practice their own polytheist religion, invoking goddesses with whom they identify. The basis of this theme is the book of Genesis, where vestiges of paganism are noticeable. For example, in Genesis 31:19, Rachel steals the household idol from Laban's tent before departing with Jacob and his people—an episode that is also rewritten in *The Red Tent*. This passage suggests a gradual transitional process from polytheism to monotheism. The novel utilizes the idea of this transition to evoke emotional, bodily, and sensual microcosms that rely on ritual practices connected to the feminine.

The female communal atmosphere described in the novel and symbolized by the red tent suggests a mode of reading Diamant's book. In her

article “Red Tent Turns to Gold”, Judith Rosen argues: “In fact, it is Diamant’s keenly imagined sense of women and community in ancient times, rather than literal biblical truth, that is part of the book’s appeal” (30). The change of focus from a story following the biblical overarching narrative to a tale about female bonding goes in line with how the novel was marketed. As Rosen explains, *The Red Tent* “was virtually ignored by the mainstream press” (30) when it was published in 1997. However, the paperback edition sparked interest a few years later through a “word-of-mouth campaign directed to Jewish synagogues” (30) that gradually reached other religious congregations until it eventually became a worldwide secular success that has since been translated into 15 languages. This unusual strategy mirrors the idea of storytelling from the margins that the novel itself conveys through the renewed Dinah, who becomes the non-canonical narrator of tales of joy and fulfillment, pain, and disappointment.

The Red Tent is constantly listed as a preferred text among women’s book clubs, which is probably because of a plot wherein reimagined versions of female characters from the book of Genesis are foregrounded, and their feelings and thoughts rendered explicit. With this premise, the novel suggests a social reading experience closely related to the modern conception of women’s book clubs popularized by mass media. Referencing Brian Hall, Jane Missner Barstow explains that “we need books or films to create shared conversational niches”, adding that “[w]ith book clubs [...], ‘a deeply, emotionally rewarding’ conversation can occur thanks to the obvious fact that everyone has agree to read and discuss the same text” (10). Furthermore, Barstow argues that “[women] still desire the opportunity to bond with other women. Literature provides a kind of coded language, then, that allows them to get at personal traumas and especially their experiences and roles as wives, mothers, daughters” (11). Diamant’s work modifies the premise of the biblical text that probably results in appealing to many women who identify with the characters and their social interactions.

Catherine Burwell cites studies highlighting the importance of women’s book clubs as “sites of both productive cultural work and the dissemination of literary taste, places where women now and in the past have sought to acquire cultural capital” (286). In the red tent envisioned by Diamant, the lives inspired by biblical women reveal the possibility of a secret sisterhood where knowledge on healthcare, cooking, and beauty is transmitted

with generosity. Women's book clubs seem to be the equivalent of this fictional space created by the author of the novel. According to Burwell, research on women's book clubs indicates that this social mode of enjoying a text involves "imaginative acts of identification and narration of the self, as well as female bonding and solidarity" (286). This idea of a space for identification, narration, bonding, and solidarity among women is essential in *The Red Tent*. It seems to mark the turn that separates it from the biblical source material whose thematic concerns, already mentioned in the introduction of this article, are very different.

In her 2001 article on the book, Lauren R. Taylor highlights the communal experience that *The Red Tent* describes within its plot and the one that it suggests as a reading experience. Her article is particularly relevant because it captures the phenomenon during the moment when it was occurring, providing a well-thought analysis of how the symbolic notion of the red tent overlapped with the reception of the novel in spaces that reduplicated a similar sense of female identification and social interaction. Taylor argues that

[the book] has become a bestseller because readers—most of them women—are telling other women about it [...] Mothers are telling daughters, and daughters are telling mothers, that they must read it. Old high school friends are calling to say, 'Get this book'. Women are buying several copies to give as gifts. Everybody's talking about a book about women talking. ("Well-Received Wisdom for Women")

Furthermore, in terms of distribution, Taylor pertinently compares Diamant's novel with Rebecca Wells' *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, another bestseller connected to the word-of-mouth phenomenon and, more importantly, to female bonding as an essential theme.

Wells' novel offers several glimpses to the small pleasures of female-friendly intimacy. Siddalee, the main character of *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, feels that this level of relationship could bring a boost of relief, joy, and hope to her life. The narrator of Wells' novel celebrates the "porch friendship" as an encounter of imagination, pleasure, and the body (37). In *The Red Tent*, Dinah highlights the sweet flavors of cakes, the healing powers of plants, the comforting caresses and gestures of her "mothers", and the knowledge and wisdom developed within the limits of their private microcosms separate from

the world of men. Diamant's book becomes a peculiar example of biblical fiction that is also filled with themes that easily connect with many works that portray women's friendship in specific contexts, such as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. The representation of female relationships in contemporary terms, at least tentatively, helps explain the reception of *The Red Tent* as a favorite among women's book clubs as well as an inspiration for initiatives aimed to support women¹.

KISSES OF HIS MOUTH

The idea of *The Red Tent* as a book that motivates a social reading experience among women could be partially related to the elements of the romance novel that the author incorporates into her work. Although the novel can be correctly categorized as biblical fiction, it is important to remark that elements from the romance novel also play a role in constructing Diamant's prose. For instance, in the depictions of erotic relations, Diamant heavily relies on an expressive use of language that evokes romance fiction. This particular trait of the novel is noticeable through the physical description of Jacob and Shalem (the name given to the novelized version of the Canaanite prince that defiled Dinah in the biblical account) and the way they interact romantically and sexually with their partners. The following paragraphs show some examples extracted from the novel to illustrate the notion of escapist romantic fantasy that is a constituent part of the narrative.

In *The Red Tent*, Jacob is an idealized vision of gentle masculinity. Regardless of the eventual changes that the character suffers, young Jacob is characterized as a vessel of masculine virtues who dutifully fulfills women's romantic and sexual desires. When Leah describes her wedding night, she highlights his tenderness as a lover: "Then his hands came to life. They wandered over my face, through my hair, and then, oh, on my breasts and belly, to my legs and my sex, which he explored with the lightest touch" (38–9). When Rachel is jealous because he married Leah first, Jacob presents himself as a skilled romantic speaker: "Jacob held her to his chest until it seemed she was asleep and told her that she was the moon's own daughter, luminous, radiant, and perfect. That his love for her was worshipful [...] That she, only Rachel, would be the bride of his heart, his first wife, first love" (42). When Dinah sees her father, she describes him in the following manner: "I saw that he was not only

tall but also broad-shouldered and narrow in the waist. Although by then he must have passed his fortieth summer, his back was straight, and he still had most of his teeth and a clear eye. My father was handsome, I realized” (104).

The novel presents Jacob as a considerate, tender, and sexually proficient romantic hero. An early passage reveals that his virile member is “[t]wice the size of that of any normal man” (35) and his number of sons implies a sexual potency that is celebrated and well-regarded among men (45). Throughout the story, he is described as a good father and a fair man who listens to his wives and helps women such as Ruti and Inna. As the biblical story implies, he is hard-working, intelligent, and prosperous. Diamant manages to provide a clever biblical explanation for the sensitivity of her romantic hero. Jacob is the product of the teachings of Isaac (his father) who only loved Rebecca, his mother (39). This explanation makes sense in relation to the biblical passage that says: “So Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife and he loved her” (MEV Genesis 24:67)². Although this is without a doubt a reimagined version of Jacob, it is interesting that Diamant carries out his construction as a romantic hero and ideal of masculinity by expanding some elements from the book of Genesis.

According to Diamant’s retelling, the Canaanite prince Shalem is not a rapist. The novel presents him as a positive character that tenderly seduces Dinah and wants her as his wife since their first sexual encounter. He is a considerate lover who treats her well while they spend several days making love in his princely chambers. This presentation of Shalem as an impossibly wealthy, kind, and handsome lover perfectly agrees with a “type” regularly present in popular romance novels. The following passage is an example of the idealized physical appearance that he possesses as described by Dinah:

His name was Shalem. He was a firstborn son, the handsomest and quickest of the king’s children, well-liked by the people of Shechem. He was golden and beautiful as a sunset [...]

He was perfect.

To avoid looking up into his face, I noticed that his fingernails were clean and that his hands were smooth [...] He wore only a skirt, and his chest was naked, hairless, well-muscled. (226)

Shalem is depicted in a way that makes Dinah (and possibly the readers) swoon; in this sense, his construction as a character indicates a relation with the typical representation of the hero in romance novels. The excerpt above is an important reference to the male body. Jonathan A. Allan indicates that romance novels glorify “the male body, maleness, masculinity, and male sexuality” (10). Following the conventions of this popular genre of literature, Shalem only wears a skirt, revealing him as an object of sexual desire for Dinah.

However, Shalem is not only an object of desire; he is also a subject capable of providing intense pleasure and affection. The sexual fantasy is fulfilled when he seduces the heroine in the palace, and she joyfully consents. The following excerpts exemplify how romance and sexuality are represented in Shalem’s passages:

Shalem drew me into the shadow of a corner and put his hands on my shoulders and covered my mouth with his mouth and pressed his body against mine [...] He did not hurry or push, and I put my hands on his back and pressed into his chest and melted into his hands and his mouth. (235)

Through the romantic and sexual interactions with Shalem, Dinah discovers the pleasure that emanates from her own body. In the biblical narration, there is an episode of sexual aggression that precedes a strange transition from lust to love that is only conveyed through a masculine point of view: “When Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the land, saw her, he took her and lay with her and defiled her. He was very smitten by Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke kindly to her” (MEV Genesis 34:2-3). Diamant eliminates the violent component of this biblical narrative and renders Shalem as a romantic hero, using only the verse that refers to him as a man in love who speaks “kindly” to the heroine. This pivotal decision erases the possibility of a critical analysis of Dinah’s perspective regarding her rape, which does not take place in the novel. However, this reimaged representation of the relationship between Dinah and her lover foregrounds another important topic: sexual pleasure from the woman’s perspective in a consensual relation with a man.

The only direct example of a woman openly expressing sexual desire

within the biblical canon is the poetic bride from the Song of Songs. Therefore, like the King and the Shulamite who find incomparable delight in their shared desires and bodies, Dinah and Shalem's story motivates a reading process in which the heroine and narrator of the novel becomes a woman with explicit desires and agency, both of which are in conflict with the social and legal framework of her time. Diamant does not erase the violent episode that occurs after the prince asks Jacob's permission to marry Dinah from her retelling. As a result, the massacre of the Shechemites in the novel emphasizes the lack of control that women had over their own bodies and their limited options against the decisions of their male relatives in biblical times.

The representations of Jacob and Shalem as ideals of masculinity in the terms exposed throughout this section seem to reproduce part of the conventions of popular romance novels. According to Allan, "[r]omance novels, more often than not boast an 'alpha male' as hero; for example, a burly and rustic cowboy, a desirable millionaire..." (2). As a tribal leader and capable shepherd, Jacob seems closer to the idea of an attractive 'cowboy', while the prince Shalem seems to represent the seductive 'millionaire'. Jacob and Shalem—with their handsomeness, power, and sexual drive—are alpha males echoing the conventional type of heroes from popular fiction. Allan explains that "it must be admitted that the romance novel is still, by and large, committed to 'spectacular masculinity'" (9-10); indeed, Jacob and Shalem are rendered as spectacular men in some passages. Although *The Red Tent* is not entirely a romance novel, Jacob and Shalem are often depicted as heroes from this genre. It is important to mention that Diamant does not incorporate the convention superficially; she effectively utilizes these appealing and spectacular characters to explore romantic and sexual fantasy as means to understand pleasure from the woman's point of view.

CONCLUSIONS

In *The Red Tent*, Anita Diamant reimagines Dinah as a narrator from biblical times. In this way, the text confers voice to the character and shows her as a keen observer and eloquent storyteller capable of transmitting sensations and impressions compellingly. Through this version of the character, Diamant's novel offers an alternative to the masculine perspective predominant in the book of Genesis. The author shifts the focus from the political themes and the

overarching narrative of the Old Testament to a tale with feminist undertones concentrating on how women share knowledge and experiences.

The red tent emerges as a symbolic innovation representing the space where women share their stories and nurture female relationships based on solidarity. This symbol also suggests how many female readers have enjoyed the book itself as an inspiring topic of conversation and an enduring favourite in many women's book clubs. The communal experience depicted in the novel has been reproduced in spaces that transcend the limits of fiction. In this manner, the interest of the book does not only rely on the plot and characters but also on the reading experience that it motivates and in its reception as a social experience among women.

Diamant incorporates generic elements from romance popular fiction, especially in the way she characterizes Jacob and Shalem. The author's choice of characterizing the male figures as romance heroes probably serves to provide some popular appeal to the text. However, it also effectively contributes to present female romantic fantasies as valid expressions of desire and as a literary recognition of women's right to satisfy their sexual appetites in sex-positive environments. Considering that the desires of many female biblical characters such as Dinah remain unexpressed in the Bible, the novel offers a refreshing opportunity to imagine them through elements associated with conventional romantic fantasy.

The red tent as a suggestion of a social experience for women, as well as the use of romance genre conventions, both distinguish Diamant's novel from other retellings connected to the story of Dinah. By incorporating these new elements into her work, Diamant demonstrates the pliability of biblical storytelling to inspire literary works in tune with the interests of a contemporary audience.

NOTES

1. "(Michelle) Scharf read the book in late 1999, and in one year, she transformed her life. The book inspired the stay-at-home mother of three to pursue her passion and create a 'birth circle'—a group of midwives, childbirth educators and laywomen who support birthing mothers who meet monthly

and who call themselves The Red Tent” (Taylor).

2. Throughout this article, Scripture is taken from the Modern English Version. Copyright © 2014 by Military Bible Association. Used by permission (Fair use). All rights reserved.

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DECOLONIZING POP ART: HATECOPY AND THE SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

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Sociologist Yasmin Hussain states in *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*: “The overlapping of identities that characterises the diasporic experience creates a cultural hybridity” (9). There is often a sense of displacement that arises from growing up in a diaspora, never feeling fully connected to the place of residence or the culture of one’s (or one’s parents’) homeland. This complex negotiation of cultural identity for those of the South Asian diaspora is explored by Toronto based artist Maria Qamar (1991-), who uses the handle Hatecopy on social media. Through her satirical Pop Art works, she gives a much-needed voice to those navigating South Asian diasporic identity in Western society. The sharing of immigrant experiences not only creates space for diasporic stories but also renders them visible in the larger cultural narrative. Qamar, who is half-Bengali and half-Gujrati, was born in Pakistan, where she resided until moving to Mississauga, Canada in 2000. After 9/11, she experienced incessant religious discrimination premised on visibility politics, which partly motivated the beginning of her creative practice (Khan). Due to parental pressure, she studied advertising at Seneca College. She began seriously pursuing her career in the arts after losing her job as a copywriter in 2015¹. With no formal art education, her work became globally recognized through Instagram, where she now has nearly two hundred thousand followers. She has exhibited in Toronto, New York City, London, and Paris, and been featured in numerous popular magazines.

Qamar’s work both uses² and subverts American Pop Art traditions by mixing Roy Lichtenstein’s graphic style with issues related to the South Asian diaspora, such as social expectations of women, ideals of beauty, cultural appropriation, and hybrid identities. Qamar explains: “It is exactly what Lichtenstein had done back then, only now for a group of people that has been largely ignored by the American media for a very long time. I aim to

make our presence known in the West as it is my home...and also because the conversation belongs to us, too" (Dastur). I view her work as an attempt to decolonize the Western white male-dominated Pop Art movement through the insertion of female South Asian experiences, bodies, and voices. Through her use of common cultural tropes and shared experiences, she creates a space for people belonging to the South Asian diaspora who are raised in Canada but are overlooked in mainstream culture. As a Bangladeshi Canadian who was raised in two often contradictory cultures, I use my lived experience to supplement the analysis of her works in this essay.

HYBRIDITY

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall presents a notion of hybrid identity as that of identity as fluid. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall argues: "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (225). This is especially apparent for South Asians, whose identities are in constant flux based on our social environment and relationships. For example, since South Asians' arrival to North America, they have raised new generations whose lives and self-images have been conditioned by circumstances different from those familiar to their parents (Hussain 1). For this reason, the nature of being part of a diaspora continues to change through generations and cross-cultural experiences. Qamar often speaks of her complicated relationship with her "desi"³ identity which she initially tried to suppress due to the difficulties of being a young immigrant in Canada, but subsequently worked to reclaim as an adult. She says: "As a kid, everything I would do that was inherently desi would be silenced. Like, you know: don't bring this lunch to class, it smells like curry... So you spend a lot of your childhood silencing yourself and stripping yourself of your culture, and then you realise that this is who I am. I can't live any other way or exist any other way" (Metha). Qamar's relationship with her identity resonates with other immigrant people who see themselves as Canadians and as a racialized minority whose place in society can be questioned. As a visible minority growing up in Canada, I too felt the need suppress elements my Bangladeshi culture to avoid judgement, mockery, or bullying. Interestingly, the "smelly" curry, *bindi*,

and other things that were used as reasons to mock us are now trendy in the West. The process of recovering and reclaiming the parts of ourselves that have been silenced can take time and often be emotional. Qamar's combination of humour with these shared (sometimes traumatic) experiences in her works helps express the mixed emotions felt by diasporic people.

Qamar's decision to choose a highly recognizable, primarily Western style to share her diasporic narratives is reflective of her hybrid identity. She says: "I moved over from Pakistan to Canada when I was a child and wanted to create something that would merge these two cultures together. I thought I needed some 'desi-ness' in my work. I started doing generic henna designs ... It was also too abstract. I wanted to create art with a message - something people would get straight away" (Shah). Her referencing of Lichtenstein's style serves a dual purpose – it is a representation of the merging of her cultures and it allows her to easily and clearly convey her message with the insertion of texts. While the texts in Lichtenstein's images can occasionally be cryptic, Qamar's message is designed to be clear to her intended audience.⁴ She looks at familiar everyday situations, such as overprotective parents and dating, through the lens of a woman of colour. Thus, in her art, the experiences of the South Asian diaspora are not portrayed outside of the "Canadian" experience but as a part of it. In 2017, she hand-sketched and digitally coloured the image *6GODDESS* (Image 1) to explore South Asian presence in Toronto specifically. She chose this work as one of her favorites in a Flare magazine interview and explained: "[These are] Drake prayer hands to represent Toronto, to represent my presence in Toronto" (Ansari). The work appropriates a current cultural phenomenon and inserts elements of the artist – her culture (henna and gold jewelry) and gender (the feminine hand and the title). Her manipulation of an easily recognizable image serves as reminder to her South Asian Canadian viewers that their culture is part of the fabric of Canadian society. Moreover, this image challenges notions of a white Canada as represented in media by affirming the immigrant presence.

Both Lichtenstein's famous *Love Comic* paintings and Qamar's canvases are usually populated with melodramatic female characters. Lichtenstein appropriated the images from love or romance comics, which became a major phenomenon in popular American culture, particularly amongst teenage girls, after the second world war (Collins 102). Lichtenstein

said that he began using scenes from such magazines in 1962 because he liked their clarity and simplicity of style (102). However, his works drew attention due to his penchant for skewering false ideals of love, relationships, and the artworld. “Unlike the love comics, Lichtenstein’s paintings address an older, more sophisticated audience, one for whom these stories open a retrospective vista on love usually at odds with their idyllic promise” (102). Qamar too draws inspiration from another medium – Indian and Pakistani soap operas. Her famous aunties, as shown in her painting in collaboration with Bubbu the Painter, *WHEN YOUR BETI QUILTS COLLEGE TO SELL WAIST TRAINERS ON THE GRAM* (Image 6), who are well-meaning meddlers that give contradictory advice, are placed in hyperbolic scenarios such as crying over burnt roti or their daughters’ choices. Qamar says: “I draw from phrases and expressions I’ve gathered from growing up with my aunties, my mother and various Indian movies and soaps. It’s my way of connecting with a past that I had let go when I moved to the west” (Minhas, “Artist to Watch”). Bollywood, soap operas, Tagore’s music, and other forms of South Asian entertainment is one of ways immigrants feel connected to the culture of their homeland. Both aunties and absurd soap operas are an easily recognizable phenomena among many South Asian immigrants, thus the shared references attract viewers to her work. She adds: “There were no role models for young desi immigrants to look up to on the Disney Channel, so we looked down on ourselves. As a child I assimilated too quickly. I... was forced to mask my identity. However, at home nothing made me happier than a solid 3-hour, corny-as-hell, desi Rom-Com” (Minhas, “3 South Asian Artists”). By drawing from her own experiences, Qamar is able to avoid fetishization when narrating her cultural identity. The women she paints look as if they were plucked from mid-century India with their *bindi*, heavy gold nose rings, ornate *jhumkas* (chandelier earrings) (Bascaramurty). Although Qamar prefers not to paint the skin colour of her subjects, the repetition of recognizable motifs put their South Asian culture in the forefront – the brown body becomes unavoidable, and thus cannot be rendered invisible. Patricia Williams, writing about black women, differentiates between good and bad visibility in her work (Oliver 148). For Williams, “[g]ood visibility is characterized as responsible vision that does not stereotype by group but recognizes individuality yet includes blacks as a group with social presence or importance. Bad visibility has various forms

including invisibility, unseeing, hypervisibility, stereotyping, making a spectacle, and other types of exaggerate seeing” (149). While the aunties are hyperbolic and comical, they are not made into spectacles or negative stereotypes of South Asians. Moreover, satirical of images do not generalize South Asian women as their representations are varied and usually part of discussions pertaining to specific issues related to the community. Qamar makes the aunties and other desi subjects visible in a way that can be both critical and empowering of South Asian culture and women.

POLITICS OF TEXT/LANGUAGE

Akin to Lichtenstein’s comics inspired works, Qamar combination of text and images adds another dimension of relatability and humour to the narrative of the works. She uses a mixture of English and Hindi words, slangs, or sayings, such as “*jhoota*” (shoe)⁵ or “*beti*” (daughter), which are recognizable to many people in the South Asian diaspora. Although Hindi is only one of the many languages spoken in the South Asian sub-continent, a significant portion of South Asian immigrants and descendants have some grasp of Hindi due to huge popularity of Bollywood and similarities among the Sanskrit-based languages. She does not feel the need to translate the words to English, which is based on the desire to communicate with her fellow South Asian diasporic audience. Qamar says: “We were always trying to fit in. But now I’m like, I’m just gonna talk to my people for a minute” (Onstad). The first thing that newcomers to Canada must do is communicate in English or French. Young immigrants tend to absorb mainstream culture faster than their parents and, in many cases, become more comfortable speaking in English or French than their mother-tongue. In essence, English often equates to Canadian-ness for some immigrant groups. After moving to Canada at the age of nine and learning French and English (while losing my ability to read or write Bengali), I myself have experienced of the way immigrant children focus on learning the commonly spoken language to gain the acceptance of their peers. This desire to fit into Western culture sometimes comes at the price of forgetting or ignoring elements of our culture and language. By inserting elements of the Hindi language, Qamar not only reclaims her immigrant identity but works towards bridging the (perceived) distance between mainstream Western and South Asian cultures. Furthermore, Qamar’s Hinglish (mixing of English with

Hindi) reflects the experience of younger or second-generation immigrants who often mix languages while communicating amongst themselves. This mixed language is an important part of our hybrid identities, which separates us from people who do not understand our language and some immigrant parents who are often more comfortable in their mother tongues. Qamar often calls her art an “inside joke” and the hybrid language becomes the key to understanding this joke.

The use of text in her art elevates her characters from being merely included to giving them a much-needed voice. Throughout Western history of art, brown or black bodies and voices have been generally rendered invisible or illegible, or made part of the white narrative. Qamar says: “The discrimination is more subtle as an adult; women of colour are underrepresented in the media and in galleries. Our voices are silenced on a larger scale and are often unable to reach out to our communities. To me, that’s worse than any slur,” says Qamar (Hasan). Along with the physical presence of South Asian bodies, the texts aid in shaping the meaning of the image and creating narratives that pertain to the South Asian diaspora. These narratives sometimes relate to experiences with broader culture (such as her Brad images discussed below) but they generally focus on highlighting and commenting on the diaspora. In the untitled 2015 work (Image 2), she depicts a mustached man and woman wearing a *bindi* celebrating with the text: “We’re not having a daughter!” Without the text, the somewhat generic image of a happy couple hugging could be interpreted in various ways. Instead, the short sentence makes a powerful political statement about the tendencies of certain South Asian communities to be more preferential toward male children over female ones. The inspiration behind this image is based on how she felt her “parents thought when [she] was born” and her own difficulties understanding why “daughters are seen as a burden in Desi culture” (Aggarwal-Schiffelitte). The audience may get a laugh from the satirical image, but more importantly, it serves to start much-needed conversations about serious issues in our communities. While every family or community dynamic is different, most South Asian communities are based on patriarchal values. Qamar’s and other feminists’ works can provide opportunities for discussion and potential for change within the diaspora. As her work gained recognition, Qamar has had occasional encounters with aunties who have spoken directly to her “about

some of her edgier works, offering – as usual – unsolicited advice: “Why not draw pictures of pretty women that aren’t saying anything? The speech bubbles are the whole point, she tells them” (Bascaramurty). Putting the female voice in forefront subverts the notions of the good “quiet brown girl.” She, along with her frequent collaborator, Babbu the Painter, works towards changing this image by highlighting the complexities of South Asian diasporic female experiences. Furthermore, Qamar’s prioritizing of text is reflective of the dialogical approach to her work. One of the aims of her works is to create a space for young girls to discuss the issues and act on making change, which is why she wrote her 2017 comical guidebook, *Trust No Auntie*.

SUBVERTING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

A recurring trope in Lichtenstein’s Pop Art works is a white male character named Brad. The name ‘Brad’ was popular in the post-war era for “the clean-cut, all American male” (Collins 106). Brad, in *Drowning Girl* (1963) and *I know...Brad* (1964), is the focus of the melodramatic female subjects’ thoughts. Their emotions for him drive the narrative of the paintings even when he is not physically present in the works. In his 1962 *Masterpiece*, an unnamed blonde woman reassures a pensive Brad about his work stating: “Why, Brad darling, this painting is a MASTERPIECE! My, soon you’ll have all of NEW YORK clamoring for your work!” Art historian Bradford Collins explains that the “concocted scene nicely illustrates Freud’s conception of the modern artist as one who ‘allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes.’ Pondering a professional triumph, Brad already has been blessed with the ultimate erotic success, chiseled good looks and a glamorous, admiring girlfriend” (109). Through Brad, Lichtenstein projects his “indulgent fantasy of transformation, from plain, loveless professional failure to handsome and adored leader of the avant-garde... [Letty] Eisenhower asserts the Brad was his *alter ego*, ‘the strong, cool, good looking WASP that [this slight Jewish man] had always envied and wanted to be” (Collins 110). Whether or not the reference is intentional, Qamar’s works also features a character type named Brad, as seen in the title of the 2017 image, *Bradley NOOOOoooo* (Image 3). In the image, Brad inquires if his *kurta* (a type of South Asian attire) makes him look “cultured” while the female character sheds a tear in reaction to his unintentionally ignorant choice of words. Instead of being the centre of attention or the ideal image of

the artist, Brad has become a comic relief. Qamar explained in an interview: “Brad just symbolises the innocent non-desi white guy. He means well but ends up saying some dumb shit once in a while” (Metha). Qamar’s Brad bears striking resemblance to Lichtenstein’s blonde women with sharp black brows. Like Lichtenstein’s blondes, Brad is used to add humour (and the occasional cringe factor) to the narrative of Qamar’s paintings. In *Namaste*, Brad says the Hindu greeting with proud smile while the female character rolls her eye in annoyance. Brad’s attempts to appropriate South Asian culture is something that is commonly witnessed by diasporic people. Brad is no longer the infallible all-American male subject, instead he is the one making silly mistakes. In Qamar’s works, the ideal self is not someone with blond hair and blue eyes nor is the South Asian person’s self-worth determined by the attention of the white man. Qamar presents a female character with whom audiences relate as most diasporic people share the female character’s exasperation towards the usually well-meaning but ignorant people who appropriate, make assumptions, or ask offensive questions about our cultures.

POP ART IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The dissemination of Qamar’s works on Instagram is a twenty-first century update to Pop Art’s appropriation of mass-production. Lichtenstein’s oil and magna paint works were heavily criticized by art critics for being shallow and vulgar, and yet were popular amongst upper class New York collectors. Qamar’s works, which are usually praised for their subject matter but sometimes criticized by online trolls for the appropriation of Lichtenstein’s style, are available for viewing and purchasing on the Internet. She says: “I got discovered thanks to Instagram, so I can’t imagine where I would be without it. It’s a great discovery tool that allows young artists to be disruptive and allows our work to be seen outside of the typical establishments like art galleries” (Minhas, “Artist to Watch”). Qamar’s work is not bound to the politics of exclusion embedded in museums and art galleries; her work is accessible to numerous Instagram users who may otherwise be unable to attend exhibitions. She adds: “I think it’s exciting that women of colour are using social media to share their artwork. I hope one day we’ll have our own galleries—instead of trying to jam our work into galleries that won’t take us” (Shamsher). Her prominence on social media has led to opportunities to exhibit and her

exhibitions often attract people who may not feel comfortable in a typical museum setting due to lack of representation of South Asians in mainstream gallery spaces. “It’s difficult to explain to a desi family why a career in the arts is realistic because they can go into a gallery and say, ‘where are we?’. It’s the fault of the art community as well, it’s not really a domain where people of colour are featured that often, whether it’s the Museum of Modern Art in New York or Louvre in Paris” (Kumar). Rather than vying for the attention of fine arts museums, Qamar uses her social media platform to share her ideas and to create her own community of fans who are rarely represented by the larger (predominantly white) institutions.

Social media allows for unmediated communication between the content creators and their followers from all over the world. Qamar says: “I always wanted to make these jokes, I just didn’t really have anyone to make these jokes with. My Instagram is sort of my way of making these jokes and sharing them with another person...I get DM’s and messages all the time. They say ‘this stuff is so relatable and this happens to me and my friend all the time, how did you even know?’ I just say ‘I’ve gone through it too’” (Khan). Instagram allows her to easily communicate with other racialized people, especially girls who experience similar things. For example, her 2015 drawing, *WHERE THE PARTY AT ANJALI??* (Image 4) Shows a girl in a crop top with the words “Baby Slut” telling her surprised but impressed friend about her strategy to “throw on a kurta before leaving” the house. The more modest kurta cloaks her from her parents as she, like many other young South Asians growing up in the West, indulges in common Western norms, such as drinking alcohol, partying, premarital sex, or dating, which are taboo in many South Asian cultures. “At school, there’d be girls coming in hijabs and taking them off to do their hair and make-up in the washroom. Many would have miniskirts underneath sweatpants. A lot of the humour is rooted in trauma... girls getting scrutinised for their choices,” says Qamar (Kumar). Based on my experience, it is common among young people to share these things with each other with the unspoken understanding that neither party would divulge that information with their parents or other disapproving adults. While we code-switch or hide parts of our identity to fit in the dominant culture, a significant part of our lives can often be hidden from older members of the South Asian community. The shared experiences help to create a sense of community for viewers who

may think that they are the only ones going through these things. She further encourages the sense of community by treating her online work as memes. She says: “I purposely refuse to sign any of my illustrations because I aim to be someone whose style can be recognized without a large, tacky watermark spelling it out. It also helps others to remix the work their own way, kind of like a meme. I love when I see someone tag me in posts that may have forgot to mention or credit me. It only means my approach is working” (Minhas, “Artist to Watch”). She has also run contests where she left the speech bubble blank for the viewers to fill in. Providing social media followers opportunity to insert voices and experiences transforms the one-sided viewing experience into a multilayered relationship with the work. It should also be noted that while Qamar creates her original pieces alone, the supplemental work born out of audience interaction could be considered a form of online collective art-making practice. Shifting away from the Western idealization of the artist as a solitary (male) figure, Qamar’s approach elevates the audiences’ input to emphasize the shared experience of art creation. Her collaborative approach to her art is reflective of her desire to create to a supportive space for diasporic people as she says: “Let’s just grow together and work together to become successful on our own terms” (Niazi).

Similar to her refusal to translate the Hindi words in her text, she chooses cultural tropes and personal experiences that resonate with a specific audience rather than creating art that would resonate with everybody:⁶

I always explain my body of work, or my social media or whatever as kind of like one big inside joke or a conversation amongst like a hundred thousand cousins. So we’re all kind of in it together. It’s refreshing to see that I’m not alone in feeling a certain way...It’s outside of like yoga, butter chicken, all this like, weird—I don’t know, whatever stereotypes the media has created for Desis. But I feel like the more we talk to ourselves the more we kind of retain our sanity. We’re not alone. We’re in this together, it’s fine. (Niazi).

Her choice to address a particular audience allows for the racialized viewers to have safe space to address issues pertaining to them. These issues are usually overlooked by mainstream society due to the lack of representation of South Asian people. We are made to feel both invisible in terms of policymaking

and media representations and hypervisible in white spaces. Williams and bell hooks view the “oscillation between invisibility and hypervisibility as a matter not so much of being seen but of making one’s world” (Oliver 150). Williams explains: “I know that my feelings of exaggerated visibility and invisibility are the of my not being part of the larger cultural picture” (150). Not having our voices included in the larger cultural picture shapes our perception our self and place in society. Thus, the creation of safe spaces allows marginalized people to discuss issues caused by the lack of understanding and representation in the dominant Western culture and internalized racism and casteism rooted both in our colonial past and present as minority cultures. For example, in the work *Unfair N’ Lovely* (Image 5), Qamar starts a conversation about the common practice of skin lighting caused by the association of beauty with white-ness. She follows Pop Art’s focus on everyday items but changes the model’s face on the label to an expression of sheer horror. She explains: “I feel strongly about the picture of Fair & Lovely skin-lightening cream. My mom used it on me when I was a kid, and she would say, ‘It’s good for your skin’, and it’s obviously the complete opposite. Nobody should use it. It’s damaging to your skin, and [people use it] because darker skin is not favorable” (Aggarwal-Schiffelitte). The use of the cream and its popularity within South Asia is not only damaging to a person’s body but to their psyche as well. She adds: “It took me a long time to unlearn the teaching that lighter skin is more worthy of love than darker skin and that my Indian features were somehow less attractive, an idea that spans many cultures” (Kandula). Her acknowledgement of the internalized racism, which is an inevitable result of colonization, opens the opportunity for others to share their experiences and hopefully work towards healing together. She says: “A lot of humour is rooted in trauma. It’s how I cope. The effects of racism and abuse will never really disappear, but Hatecopy has helped me to find community and sisterhood. I am thankful for that” (Dastur).

While still early in her career, Maria Qamar has been highly successful both commercially and critically for her Instagram images and her gallery exhibitions. Her satirical South Asian Canadian Pop Art style has become instantly recognizable while her message of empowerment provides girls with a representation of a much-needed strong South Asian Canadian woman. Qamar’s identity and her mixture of Western style with issues pertaining to the South Asian diaspora are reflective of hybridization cultural

experiences that are often overlooked and/or generalized in representations of immigrant experiences. Works by Qamar and other artists both bring mainstream attention to immigrant experiences while also questioning the cultural and patriarchal issues within the South Asian diaspora.

NOTES

1. Her name, Hatecopy is based on her distaste for her previous employment as a copywriter.

2. Qamar's adaptation of Lichtenstein's style allows her works to use the cultural capital of the well-known Pop Art to gain recognizability.

3. In many of the South Asian languages "desi" means indigenous or from the country. "Desi" is popularly used among many members of the South Asian diaspora, including Qamar, to describe a person of South Asian birth or descent who lives abroad.

4. Writer and one of her fans, Manisha Aggarwal-Schifellite explains: "When I first saw her work, I was instantly drawn to her ability to combine whimsy with cultural criticism, a hard and rare balance to achieve when tackling the nuances of life."

5. These are transliterations of Hindi words, which in itself is an example of the hybridity of the languages used by immigrants.

6. I would like to note that she is happy to have her works reach non-diasporic audiences as they can help people more about our culture rather than relying on stereotypes. She stated: "I like that non-South Asians buy and share my work with their South Asian friends. It says to me, "hey, I may not fully understand what this means but I know Ashok would appreciate this." I also offer white people a way to share safe, non-problematic, Apu-free jokes with their desi colleagues" (Minhas, "3 South Asian Artists").

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IMAGES



Image 1: 6GODDESS, 2015, https://www.instagram.com/p/67_B9ICLLJ/



Image 2: Untitled, 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/1f7S65CLHV/>

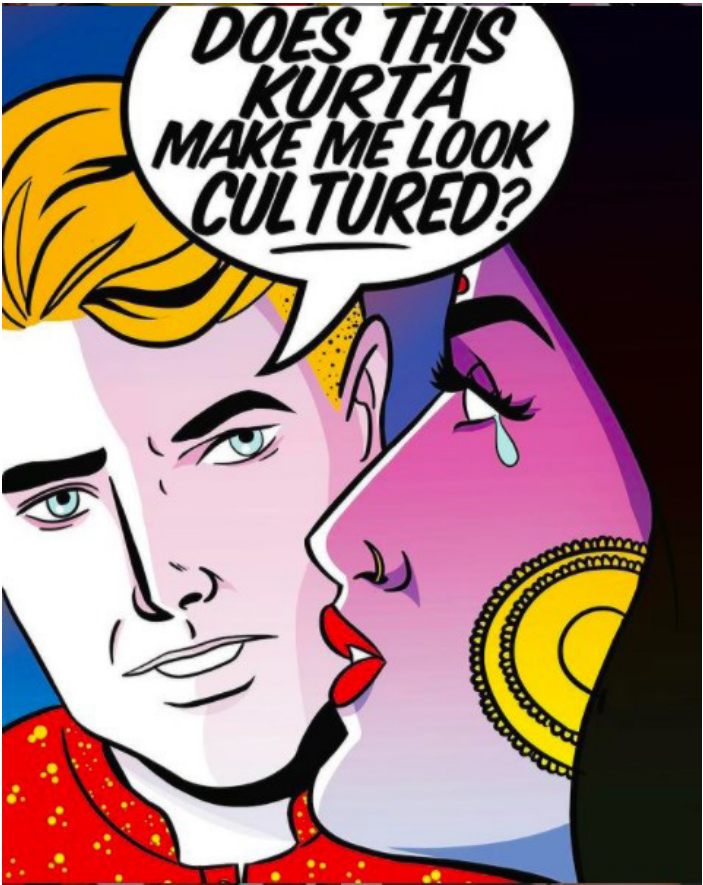


Image 3: BRADLEY NOOOOooo, 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BR3YjXLB_j5/



Image 4: *WHERE THE PARTY AT ANJALI?*, 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/5IADUuCLB1/>



Image 5: *Fair N' Lovely*, 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/-r1vBjCLJ7/>



Image 6: *WHEN YOUR BETI QUIT'S COLLEGE TO SELL WAIST TRAINERS ON THE GRAM*, In collaboration with Babbu the Painter, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/BDqv_YAiLCB/

CAN THE “MULTITUDE” BE CAMP?

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INTRODUCTION

I am honored to write an academic article – based upon a previous spoken contribution to the “Camp/camp” Conference at Western University – which represents one of those rare occasions when a scholar can confidently mix proceedings from his doctoral research¹ with a (seemingly) unrelated side passion that he has always nurtured². As summed up by the title of this intervention, in the next pages I will try to renovate Susan Sontag’s idea of camp and determine whether it can still be an *emancipatory* force for the individual. To put it differently, I will debate if it is still possible to have an attitude of pure detachment from the contemporary forms of *power*. My answer will be that, given the current circumstances of psychopolitical control and neoliberal ideology, detachment has been rendered impossible. Furthermore, I will argue that when individuals are (nothing but) their own *human capital*, camp risks turning into a reactionary force. This is not an argument against Sontag’s definition of camp, but rather an update on the emancipatory possibility of camp – almost 55 years from its first publication. As a matter of fact, it is exactly because of the differences in ideology between then and now that camp can no longer represent an emancipatory act.

This article starts from the disambiguation of an unsaid concept in Sontag’s *Notes on camp*. I believe that the author did not feel the need to specify due to some sort of phenomenological obviousness but, nevertheless, this idea carries huge relevance for the purpose of my reasoning. In my opinion, what Sontag did not mention is that for one thing to be recognized as camp there must be two elements: (1) the thing (the product, the event) itself, and (2) a beholder – the subject recognizing camp as such. While the former is *democratic*³, the latter *represents* a political matter. A Tiffany lamp is camp, but it needs an observer recognizing it as such to enter the camp conversation. Any reflection on the political relevance of camp cannot originate if these two elements aren’t identified and separated. That is to say, the political relevance of

camp lays on the relation between the (camp) subject and the (camp) object.

NEOLIBERALISM, BIOPOLITICS AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CAMP

In order to explore this claim we have to start from a preliminary question: why is camp, according to Sontag, an important spillover of dandyism? If “Camp is the modern dandyism” (Sontag, para.45) in the sense that – like dandyism – it transcends irony to make fool of the establishment, we must investigate its possibilities for frivolousness today. According to Sontag’s view, especially drawing from the life and works of Oscar Wilde⁴, the dandy observes the world from a privileged perspective. Due to his socio-economic status (which, as I will argue later, is the key element for detachment today – providing the means and resources for the mastery of *form*) he can experience the world as a playful stage – which is another way of saying that he fully lives his life *aesthetically*. By mastery of *form* I mean the absolute cynical prerogative of the dandy to understand the (social) world as a constellation of empty symbols. To live *aesthetically* is to look at (social) life as a series of incommensurable, unexchangeable moments – whereas, as I will argue later, life under capital rule requires the interchangeability of time to reproduce itself. It is no coincidence that *On Camp*’s first paragraph is as follows: “Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon” (Sontag, para.1). More importantly:

Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to “the serious.” One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious [...] Camp proposes a comic vision of the world. But not a bitter or polemical comedy. If tragedy is an experience of hyperinvolvement, comedy is an experience of underinvolvement, of detachment (Sontag, paras.41, 44)

This is where the contemporary biopolitical management of life enters the scene. Following Byung-Chul Han we can affirm that, in a psychopolitical paradigm, underinvolvement is no longer an option (Han). This is because, as Jean Baudrillard astutely foresaw, the psychopolitical individual *always* contributes to the reproduction of capitalist ideology. The best definition of contemporary *biopolitics* to me is: an infrastructure of

techniques aimed at extracting value from the individual as a whole – through self-exploitation. Biopolitics is the freedom of self-coercion (Han). It conquers the psyche as a productive force, whereas the old (Foucauldian) biopolitical control only affected the body. More specifically, control is now exercised from within ourselves⁵, whereas in Michel Foucault it was achieved through a series of external devices (Deleuze): the prison, the school, the hospital⁶. We have, I argue, two main reasons why being “a dandy in the age of mass culture” (Sontag, para.45) can’t coexist with “the democratic esprit of Camp” (Sontag, para.48).

CAMP AND AURA

The first one is represented by what an important literary product from the same period as *Notes on camp* was foreshadowing: capital is a Moloch. Like the omnivorous industrial engine in Fritz Lang’s masterpiece – Metropolis – it phagocytizes everything. To quote Toni Negri, capital is a parasitical entity, a vampire⁷. Therefore, even camp cannot escape *capital*. As Boltanski and Chiapello sharply document in *The new spirit of capitalism* (Boltanski et al.), this *spirit of capitalism* is nothing but the history of capital’s reconciliation with its critiques. As a matter of fact, we can store *Notes on camp* among a long series of works that somehow adhere to the criteria of what Boltanski and Chiapello define *artistic critique*. A shared background for this critique is the “denunciation of mass production” that goes hand in hand with “a correlative denunciation of the massification of human beings” (Boltanski et al., chap.7). This is evident in paragraph 46: “camp – Dandyism in the age of mass culture – makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica” (Sontag, para.46). The denunciation of mass production here is more subtle: Sontag is not lamenting the loss of the *aura*⁸, but rather the mere possibility of any pre-established *aura*. Every object is unique because camp taste is unique: this is how replica is transcended.

WHEN EVERYTHING IS CAPITAL, EVEN CAMP IS CAPITAL

If in 1964 it was sensible to imagine an artistic way out of capital – *de facto* building the foundations for a material exploration of such a field of possibilities in the following years – we all got accustomed now to the impracticability of a similar approach⁹. This is because

Capitalism's response to the intense demand for differentiation and demassification that marked the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s was to internalize it. This recuperation took the form of a commodification – that is to say, the transformation into 'products', allocated a price and hence exchangeable on a market, of goods and practices that in a different state of affairs remained outside the commodity sphere. Commodification is the simplest process through which capitalism can acknowledge the validity of a critique and make it its own, by incorporating it into its own specific mechanisms (Boltanski et al., chap.7)

The opportunity for detachment – the key element for dandyism and, as a consequence, camp – was ontologically and historically terminated by the gears of (capitalistic) progress. Coincidentally, we have the Met Gala 2019 as a concrete example. The Met Gala is an annual fundraising event for the New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute where top artists and celebrities show up dressed in the most daring and controversial outfits according to a main theme – which is different every year. 2019's selected theme was camp. Pop culture personalities such as Katy Perry, CardiB, or Jared Leto showed up to the gala in the *campiest* possible costumes. Their garments adhered to all of the formal requirements of camp. They definitely *looked* camp. And yet I argue that those garments, those poses – even though perfectly complying to the camp aesthetics – weren't camp. They only replicated it *hyperrealistically*, to draw from Baudrillard. *Hyperreal* is that society – according to the French author – governed by a principle of simulation. Where only capital is real, everything else regresses to a *meta*-status. Any relation with reality is mediated¹⁰.

Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra (Baudrillard and Grant, chap.Preface)

Baudrillard refers to it as the *death of the event* (“we have passed into

a kind of hyper-real where things are being replayed ad infinitum” (Baudrillard 73)): nothing new can happen because within capital domination “each segment need only demonstrate by the clock its purely quantitative equality with all the others. It has no reality apart from its exchangeability” (Debord, para.147). When social life is experienced through a code of virtuality, we are left with pure hyperinvolvement. Thus, the red carpet at the Met Gala 2019 was the opposite of camp. In order to clarify some objections that might be moved toward my paper at this point, my aim is not to criticize the superficiality of star system. That would be too easy of a target. As a matter of fact, my analysis digs deeper – and yet towards this same direction. What I’m suggesting is that we are all intertwined inside the same *reproductive code*. The Met Gala example is just a case of pure phenomenology of capital profiting from its critics. The Met Gala is the *spectacularization of spectacle*. Thus, to make a step backwards, the book I was foreshadowing earlier is, of course, *The society of the spectacle*, by Guy Debord. What Debord suggests – and what constitutes the first reason why I assert it is impossible for camp to be a revolutionary force in the contemporary age – is that any action from within the world of capital is, *de facto*, reproductive work (in post-Marxian terms). It is the replication of a code. Of ideology. *The society of spectacle* anticipated, to many extents, the great (r)evolutionary trick that capital was about to perform against the individual. As we observed earlier, capital grows through parasitism. It always needs an *outside* to conquer¹¹ and thrive. When the totality of Earth’s surface was overrun, new territories had to be explored. This is when *capital* stopped rushing outwards, and decided scouting *inwards* instead. The *neoliberal* innovation is the result of this venture. This new territory turned out to be the totality of each individual’s life – and time. The *human capitalist* is first and foremost the transplant of a *social relation*. By surreptitiously giving back time to those *entrepreneurs of the self*, capital exported

the bourgeois mode of production [...] this civilization and modernization mean capitalization, that is, incorporation within the expanding cycle of capitalist production and accumulation. In this way the noncapitalist environment (territory, social forms, cultures, productive processes, labor power, and so forth) is subsumed formally under capital (Hardt and Negri 226)

This is why I argued that it is because of the establishment of a different way of life that camp cannot be an emancipatory force nowadays. Within the neoliberal paradigm, there is no escape from any form of capitalist exchange. Particularly, there is no escape from *symbolic exchange*. When the totality of life is regulated by a *bourgeois* mode of production, everything is labour. This is the key shift in ideology: when any moment is *valuable*, it is impossible to be in a situation of play – which is *wasteful* (i.e. unproductive) by nature¹². The prerogative of the dandy is lost. To quote Baudrillard:

There is no more productive labour, only reproductive labour. In the same way there is no more ‘productive’ or ‘unproductive’ consumption, only a reproductive consumption. Leisure is as productive as labour, factory labour as ‘unproductive’ as leisure or the service industries, it is irrelevant what formula we use. This indifference precisely marks the phase of the completion of political economy. Everyone is reproductive [...] The system currently reproduces capital according to its most rigorous definition, as the form of social relations, rather than in its vulgar sense as money, profits and the economic system (Baudrillard and Grant, chap.1)

John Steinbeck once said that socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires. This is the perfect definition of human capitalist under psychopolitical control. To paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari: *there's only one class, and it's the bourgeoisie*. When even camp becomes a commodity, it is equivalent to any other form of social merchandise. There can be no dandy in a society without real references. Without a clear reference, *aristocracy* cannot establish itself as a class. This is also evident in *Notes on camp*, when Sontag asks: “since no authentic aristocrats in the old sense exist today to sponsor special tastes, who is the bearer of this taste?” (Sontag, 2018, para. 50). Nevertheless, in Sontag’s view, “camp sensibility is [...] at least apolitical” (Sontag, para.2). This is probably where I disagree the most with the text. It would be a great misunderstanding to understand dandyism as an a-political way of life. In fact, decadent philosophy and literature resonate as – and originates from – a clear, strong socio-political statement. Oddly enough, we can find a great depiction of the *social* dimension of the

dandy in Albert Camus’ *The Rebel*. The French writer suggests that “the dandy is, by occupation, always in opposition. He can only exist by defiance [...] the dandy can only play a part by setting himself up in opposition” (Camus, chap.2). It is exactly this opposition that posits itself as the key element that makes dandyism political. Counterintuitively, here lies the dandy’s political statement: by rejecting politics (because hyper-involving), he commits to a life-long political mission. Of course the dandy rejects politics, but he rejects them *aesthetically, aristocratically*¹³. In Oscar Wilde, for example, we see the rejection of the grey, inhuman theatre of the logics of political power. But, at the same time, the vulgarity¹⁴ of common people’s lives seems unbearable, too. The happy island of high society is a *boule à neige* where power is situational, circumscribed, playful. If, to quote Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi “power is the selection and enforcement of one possibility among many, and simultaneously it is the exclusion (and invisibilization) of many other possibilities”, the playfulness of *high society* lays in the fact that it openly exposes itself as just a *possibility*. Every night, every gala, every ball everyone can recreate and characterize him/herself as a radically diverse and singular individuality. At the opposite of *playfulness* stands ideology – a power that renders any alternative invisible. As I suggested on the previous pages, the ideology of capital cannot contemplate and tolerate the possibility of *whatever singularities* (Agamben and Hardt). Since the dandy “can only be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression of others’ faces” (Camus), those faces must be qualitatively different, whereas, as we saw, *capital* can only function quantitatively. Without the absolute equivalence of time – which can only be achieved by making time a resource¹⁵ – capitalist exchange is doomed to collapse.

CAMP AS A(N ELITIST) FORM OF CAPITAL

The second reason why I don’t believe in the emancipatory force of camp is related to how Sontag define and put emphasis on the role of *taste*. My argument is that, the way it is explored by the author, *taste* eventually slips into the same problems that I mentioned in the previous paragraph¹⁶. More specifically, on a deeper analysis, *taste* ends up representing class privilege. Sontag defines *taste* as “educated intelligence”: “intelligence, as well, is really a kind of taste: taste in ideas” (Sontag, Introduction). In order to put ourselves in a position to properly analyze this claim we need to approach human

capital from the lenses of post-economic theory. We already established that human capital is what the individual *is* – not what he *has*. Nevertheless, given this premise, economic theory fundamentally sees human behaviour as “participants who maximize their utility from a stable set of preferences and accumulate an optimal amount of information and other inputs in a variety of markets” (Becker 18). From this standpoint, Pierre Bourdieu adds a key element to this symbolic universe. Functioning as a link between the political economy and those who claim its death (i.e. Baudrillard), he insists on time as the universal equivalent – as the latter claim – but yet he manages to find a space for *mercantile exchange* – the focus of economic theory – by representing it as a peculiar form of *social practices*. On his book, *Forms of capital*, he claims that – as the title suggests – these social practices are interacted through the transformation of different *forms* of capital¹⁷. According to Bourdieu, each individual can be thought of as a field of forces on a continuous tension. Every time we interact, the French author suggests, we translate *capital* into the most appropriated way for our purposes. This is “a whole labor of dissimulation or, more precisely, *euphemization*” (Bourdieu 17). That said, why then is *taste* such a delicate theme here? Because, I argue, *taste* – as presented by Sontag – is the end result of the accumulation and conversion of a certain number of *forms of capital* that only the wealthy can afford. If we take as valid that, to some extent, cultural capital¹⁸ – especially in its *institutionalized state* (Bourdieu 20) – can be equal for all through the educational apparatus¹⁹, we come to understand how *taste* actually depends much more on other *forms of capital*. These other forms can only be afforded through the transformation of *labor-time*, “the universal equivalent, the measure of all equivalences [...] in accordance with a principle which is the equivalent of the principle of the conservation of energy” (Bourdieu 25). In fact, *taste* is applied knowledge – to a *social situation*. We are only able to scrutinize the social if we have the *luxury* of time. All in all, this is a refined and actualized reading of Thorstein Veblen’s depiction of the wealthy elites (Veblen and Banta): when mass production, public education and a general rise in the standards of living of the middle class render the means to display power and wealth for the upper classes obsolete, conspicuousness becomes *kitsch*. The display of *leisure time* acts inconspicuously. It doesn’t reveal itself through cars and jewels, but rather through the attainment of elitist forms of taste. Therefore, it remains what it has always been: privilege. These

are the two main reasons why I believe that *detachment* is no longer possible through camp.

A WAY OUT OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY?

I want to try to end up on a positive note. So: what could a democratic, playful way out of biopolitics be? This is no more than a draft, but it's worth mentioning. As soon as I read the *playfulness* of camp, my mind immediately went back to an audio from Alan Watts. I believe that – and this is something that I will definitely elaborate on as I will advance my research – a democratic way out of *biopolitics* can only arise from a non-Westerner, *extra-capitalist way of life*. That is to say, it seems to me that we can regain a sense of commonality only if we start thinking about ourselves as part of a bigger, purposeless, whole. This is, for example, getting back to Alan Watts, the way of the Zen. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the forthcoming of different apocalypses is shifting the way we evaluate the place of our race in the universe. The current debate on the ethics of ICTs, for example, is rapidly shifting the ontological foundation of the *infosphere* from the *entity* (the *bios*) towards the information. The work of authors like Luciano Floridi (Floridi) is aimed at shaping ethical approaches in a habitat where the sense of *direct responsibility* moves towards a *diffused responsibility*, due to the fact the actions can be performed by a *hybrid* combination of agents. The ultimate meaning of this IE (*Informational Ethics*) is, above all, an ecology of the infosphere. This ecological approach will in fact overcome an anthropocentric consideration of *agency*. An *agency* which is also, of course, harshly questioned by all those authors debating on the actual meaning of *Anthropocene*, pretty well exemplified by Donna Haraway's production. Will the crisis push us towards a new commonality? This is a question that I definitely prefer to leave open for the readers to answer.

NOTES

1. I am currently researching the ontology of consumption from a *capitalist realist* standpoint. More specifically (renewing the debate on social scarcity), I'm focusing on how consumption are essential in the process of identification of individuals – while at the same time consuming the social ground (both physical and symbolical) where these individuals coexist.

2. Decadent literature, in my case.

3. If we mean it in its broader, non-political sense, i.e. accessible to everyone.

4. To whom Susan Sontag dedicates her essay.

5. "It facilitates intervention in the psyche and enables influence to take place on a pre-reflexive level". (Han, chap.1)

6. Han, again: "The orthopaedic technology of disciplinary power is too crude to penetrate into the deeper layers of the soul – with its hidden wishes, needs and desires – and take it over. Bentham's Big Brother only observes inmates from the outside. His panopticon is bound to the optical medium. It has no access to inner thoughts or needs". (Han, chap.4)

7. "A mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude—as Marx would say, a vampire regime of accumulated dead labor that survives only by sucking off the blood of the living" (Hardt and Negri 62)

8. For more on that, see (Benjamin).

9. On this quick historical recap, it is worth noting David Graeber's description of post-modernism, the cultural ethos standing between *Notes on camp* and now: "The postmodern moment was a desperate way to take what could otherwise only be felt as a bitter disappointment and to dress it up as something epochal, exciting, and new" (Graeber 4).

10. On a certain sense, we can say that Baudrillard's work on *simulacra* constitutes the background for today's theories on *capitalist realism*.

11. "There is an intrinsic relation between capitalism and expansion, and that capitalist expansion inevitably takes the political form of imperialism". (Hardt and Negri 221)

12. Everything remains within the game. It starts and end there.

13. "We in the House of Lords are never in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilised body" (Wilde, bk.A woman of no importance)

14. Almost etymologically.
15. As a matter of fact, the *scarcest* resource.
16. Apparent detachment, reproductive work.
17. On his essay Bourdieu identifies three specific forms: *human capital*, *cultural capital* and *social capital*.
18. As clearly defined by Bourdieu in *Forms of capital*.
19. I totally understand that this is an overstatement. Birthplace, race, sex and wealth influence to a huge degree the ideal democraticity of education.

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(**Author's note:** all quotes without a specific page number are retrieved from e-books. In order to help the reader, I provided the chapter number – when available)

REVIEWS

Diccionario Negro de Cuba: Palabras y Testimonios del Siglo XIX. Editado por Montserrat Becerril García y Anne-Marie Brenot. Iberoamericana Vervuet, 2016. pp. 278. ISBN 978-3-95487-858-1.

Review article by Maylin Ortega Zulueta, *Western University*

Montserrat Becerril García y Anne-Marie Brenot nos presentan un diccionario no convencional con el propósito de sacar a la luz lo negro y oscuro de la sociedad cubana en tiempos de colonialismo y esclavitud. De ahí que no solo exponen las humillaciones y vejaciones de que fueron objeto los esclavos, sino los pormenores de la trata clandestina, la discriminación de que eran objeto los mulatos y la corrupción de las autoridades de la isla. Las autoras ofrecen una visión auténtica de la cotidianidad del siglo XIX en Cuba, a través de palabras contextualizadas dentro de los testimonios de perpetradores, testigos presenciales y víctimas de la esclavitud. García y Brenot plantean que la esclavitud no solo influyó en la memoria colectiva sino también en la formación de la nación cubana, lo cual logran demostrar con excelentes recursos y pocas limitaciones. La lexicología estudiada y el análisis de los testimonios demuestran el criterio ambiguo de la población cubana sobre la esclavitud y la trata. Este trabajo es de gran valor para los estudios de historia cultural, esclavitud, raza y la diáspora africana en Cuba.

En la introducción las autoras analizan la pluralidad de pensamiento que dominó la isla en el siglo XIX. De manera concisa exponen las diferencias entre abolicionistas, pseudo-abolicionistas, anti-abolicionistas, reformistas e independentistas. Además, explican los procedimientos de la práctica legal e ilegal de la trata de esclavos. El libro está dividido en dos partes. La primera consta de más de 230 entradas de la lexicología de la esclavitud con información valiosa para el campo de investigación social, agrícola, industrial, jurídico y artístico. La segunda está articulada con el testimonio de 39 viajeros europeos que vivieron en la isla transmitiendo las experiencias personales, emocionales y subjetivas de los mismos. El diccionario está antecedido por un “Breve encuadre geográfico y administrativo de Cuba” que examina datos geográficos,

demográficos, económicos y políticos de la sociedad colonial. El lector puede visualizar la época auxiliado por un mapa de la antigua distribución geográfica de Cuba e imágenes de los entornos de La Habana colonial, de un ingenio azucarero y de los accesorios con que encadenaban a los esclavos. Tanto el diccionario como los testimonios se pueden abordar de manera independiente. No obstante, una parte complementa a la otra haciendo de todo el material un magnífico conjunto que presenta un análisis global de las realidades esclavistas.

Las autoras muestran profundo conocimiento del trabajo realizado por los estudiosos cubanos del tema. Utilizan extractos de la *Biografía de un Cimarrón* de Miguel Barnet, la *Autobiografía de un Esclavo* de Juan Francisco Manzano, *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel* de Cirilo Villaverde, *Ecué Yambaó* de Alejo Carpentier, los estudios de Fernando Ortiz, y la obra literaria de Nicolás Guillén entre otros para contextualizar el uso de la lexicología. Al mismo tiempo, hacen una excelente labor al capitalizar la visión de los residentes extranjeros con el escrutinio de manuales, censos de dotación de los ingenios, cartas, ensayos políticos, e ilustraciones de la época. Por ejemplo, en contrapunto con el *Ensayo político sobre la isla de Cuba* de Alejandro Humbolt (1826), están las cartas de Frederika Bremer (1854) y *Confessions d'un négrier. Les aventures du capitaine Poudre-à-Canon, trafiquant en or et en esclaves* de Théodore Canot (1820-1840). En diálogo con la *Colección de vistas de los principales ingenios de azúcar de la isla de Cuba* de Justo G. Cantero (1857) está la obra plástica de los tres principales pintores extranjeros que estuvieron en Cuba en ese período: los franceses Frédéric Mialhe (1810-1881) y Édouard Laplante (1818-1860) y el español Víctor Patricio Landaluze (1830-1889). Uno de los méritos fundamentales de la obra, en mi criterio, está en la yuxtaposición de las perspectivas locales y foráneas de las realidades esclavistas del siglo XIX en Cuba. Esa pluralidad no la encontramos en las obras de Barnet, Manzano, Villaverde y Carpentier antes mencionadas las cuales ofrecen solo la perspectiva local. Por consiguiente, considero que García y Brenot aportan una visión novedosa.

La tradición de diferenciar el español de Cuba tiene sus orígenes en el *Diccionario de voces cubanas* del geólogo Esteban Pichardo Tapia, el cual contó con varias ediciones en 1836, 1849, 1861, 1862 y 1875. En reacción a las presiones de la Real Academia Española (RAE) por imponer una tendencia monolingüe surgieron otras iniciativas como *El Españolito vocabulario cubano*

de Constantino Suárez. Dicho trabajo se difundió como suplemento de la 14va edición del diccionario de la RAE en 1921. No podemos dejar de mencionar el *Catauro de Cubanismos* de Fernando Ortiz de 1923. Estas obras, al igual que el diccionario que nos ocupa en esta reseña, más allá de su valor historiográfico extienden su valía al resaltar la diversidad étnica y cultural, el multilingüismo y la heterogeneidad del pueblo cubano. El catauro es un recipiente donde se almacenan cosas distintas desordenadamente. Una de las novedades del catauro de Ortiz fue la ausencia del orden alfabético. En consecuencia, el libro es una mezcla de apuntes lexicográficos desordenados. Su diseño sirve tanto para acopiar localismos y regionalismos de la lengua como para ilustrar la idiosincrasia regada del cubano y acarrear una crítica política y social. En su prólogo Ortiz criticó a Suárez por no haber profundizado en las diferencias del hampa afrocubana y haber seguido con pulcritud las orientaciones de la RAE pero lo alaga por haber sacado a la luz las palabras indecentes y el léxico del vulgo. El diccionario negro de García y Brenot se aproxima al catauro en la utilización de un título suigéneris. También es similar su intención de no ser solo un trabajo lexicográfico, sino también una fuente que invita al lector a profundizar en el devenir político y social de la nación cubana. Se asemeja al *Españolito* de Suárez, en la pulcra organización alfabética y dialógica.

La obra es muy abarcadora y convincente; sin embargo, algunas discrepancias entre ciertas informaciones de dominio popular y académico deben ser revisadas. Por ejemplo, el cuatro no se usa en la música cubana sino el tres; los tambores batá se conocen en Cuba con el nombre iyá, itótele y okónkolo no maman, según leguedé y boulá según; Yemayá se sincretiza con la Virgen de Regla no con la virgen del Cobre y no es la patrona de Cuba. La patrona es la Caridad del Cobre sincretizada con Oshún. Algunas inconsistencias deben ser resueltas. Por ejemplo, el testimonio de Xavier Marmier menciona al teatro y al paseo Tacón, pero las autoras se refieren al mismo lugar como mercado Tacón (pp. 129-130). La estructura de las entradas a veces rompe con la sistematicidad de presentar vocablos de diferentes idiomas en su forma cubana. Por ejemplo, *culies* aparece como entrada y entre paréntesis, la voz en inglés *coolies*. Sin embargo, no siguen el mismo procedimiento con *creole*. Solamente aparece la voz francesa *créole* como entrada. Por último, “ahorramiento” aparece como entrada y se aclara que coartación o manumisión era su sinónimo. Sin embargo, en el testimonio de Alejandro de Humboldt que utilizan para probar el uso

del vocablo aparece “manumisión” no “ahorramiento” “...cómo la manumisión favorecida por la sabiduría de las leyes ha podido ser de tal modo activa...” (García y Brenot 31-32). Entonces, para ofrecer más claridad y consistencia considero que “manumisión” debe ser presentado como entrada y “coartación” y “ahorramiento” como sinónimos ya que García y Brenot no muestran testimonios para probar su uso.

A lo largo de estas páginas las autoras invitan a un viaje al siglo XIX en Cuba. La organización alfabética y cronológica permite llevar a varios tipos lectores por diferentes caminos. Tanto a los interesados solo en las entradas lexicográficas como a los que únicamente quieren consultar los testimonios de los viajeros o los interesados en ambas partes, no terminarán su empresa sin llevarse consigo un panorama de lo negro y oscuro de la sociedad esclavista cubana. Solo me resta decir que disfruté mucho la lectura y aprendí con ella sobre el origen de vocablos que han desaparecido o se han transformado en el habla del cubano. Me impactó mucho a título personal porque pude rastrear mi propio origen siguiendo cronológicamente los hechos relatados. Soy descendiente de culíes y africanos del Central Álava y llevo el apellido Zulueta del dueño de este central azucarero. Por el aporte novedoso de los testimonios foráneos, espero que este libro logre insertarse en el canon de investigación y referencia de los estudiosos de la Cuba colonial del siglo XIX y que fructifique en futuros proyectos.

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REVIEWS

**Review of Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West*, 2018.
180 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78873-082-2**

Review article by Jeremy William Arnott, *Western University*

Deborah Cook's, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* (Verso, 2018), presents the critical epistemologies of Adorno and Foucault, utilizing such a critical constellation to illuminate the specificity of each thinker, while not reducing one to the other (*AF*, ix). For Cook, both thinkers have "much to teach us about ourselves" and our own time (*AF*, x); Adorno and Foucault are united by a shared normative commitment to an enlightened form of autonomy by which thought is able to critique and reflect upon its own time. Both Adorno and Foucault follow Foucault's refashioning of "the question of Enlightenment," endeavouring to ask, "What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (*WE* 34). In the following review, I will explore the main lines of comparison Cook draws between Adorno and Foucault, following which the methodological implications of Cook's approach will be discussed in relation to broader questions of intellectual history.

Cook develops several major lines of comparison between Adorno and Foucault, starting with Chapter 1 through to Chapter 5. She commences by locating Adorno and Foucault's shared "critical matrix" (Chapter 1, *AF* 1-31) in a Kantian-Nietzschean tradition of philosophy (*AF* 2-16), which emerges out of a shared normative commitment to autonomy as a form of resistance to various forms of totalitarianism and techniques of power. Cook proceeds to present their particular relations to the thought of Marx (Chapter 2 "Is Power Always Secondary to the Economy?" *AF* 31-60) and Freud (Chapter 3 "Notes on Individuation," *AF* 61-91), along with their respective, though entwined, conceptions of resistance (Chapter 4 "Resistance" *AF* 92-122) and "critique" (Chapter 5 "Critique," *AF* 123-151). Such presentations trod pre-established lines in scholarship: Adorno as the more dialectical thinker, analyzes power relations from a Hegelian-Marxist perspective that sees Western thought as entangled within a reified capitalist "identity-thinking;" whilst Foucault,

as a Nietzschean anti-dialectician, locates power relations in a more general economy founded on a “will to power.” Adorno’s work is pervaded by a certain “economism” which sees capitalist notions of exchange-value pervading all of society (including intellectual activity) in the form of reified “identity thinking.” Such analyses, though clearly prescient for contemporary “late-capitalism,” oftentimes blind Adorno to other “meshes of power” notably: “medicine, sexuality, reason and madness” (*AF* 38), thus Adorno’s analysis should be supplemented by a thinker such as Foucault who continually stresses that “power is not always subservient to economy” (*AF* 59-60).

In chapter 6 (“Remarks on Western Reason,” 152-162), Cook notes that despite their specific differences, Foucault and Adorno are united by a shared critique of “Western ratio” (*AF* 152), a connection which Foucault himself acknowledged in an interview with Duccio Trombadori with respect to the Frankfurt School more generally (*AF* 1). However, as Cook is careful to emphasize, neither Foucault nor Adorno criticize Reason (or Enlightenment) from the perspective of irrationalism, but rather, both attempt to create a more expansive and porous notion of Reason through a critical self-reflection of thought upon itself and its own limitations (*AF* 123-132, 152-62). Through theoretical critique, one is able to comprehend the various techniques and sites of power (including those within one’s self) and develop effective techniques of resistance accordingly. Neither thinker lapses into nostalgia for some “golden age,” or perfected form of Reason, but rather, each acknowledges the infinite task of the project of Enlightenment. To follow Foucault (and Adorno as well) such a task will entail, “the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed upon us and an experimentation with the possibility of going beyond them...a patient labour given form by our impatience for liberty” (*WE* 50). That is, via the historical-critical analysis of various technologies of power, one is able to continually develop techniques of resistance, while striving to articulate new forms of autonomy.

A notable blind spot of Cook’s analysis is her failure to consider (in depth) the work of Foucault’s early “archeological” period, specifically *The Order of Things* (1966), with its meta-critical analysis of Western systems of representation, especially given that such analyses form a strong affinity with Adorno’s late work, notably, *Negative Dialectics* (1966). Placed in constellation, these two texts are able to mutually supplement each other, with Foucault’s

work providing a more nuanced analysis of the progression of representation throughout Western thought, while Adorno's "negative dialectic" provides a means to think beyond the "dominating character" of Western ratio (*ND* 26-28).¹ Foucault's assertions at the end of *The Order of Things* regarding the disappearance of the human—"man is an invention of recent dates... [who will] be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea (*OT* 387)—can be used to complement Adorno's discussions of domination by providing a potentially Nietzschean post-humanist subject who is able to flourish beyond the capitalist order of things. In these texts, both thinkers invite us to consider innovative and self-critical models of the university. Both consider the ways in which fringe or marginal disciplines (Foucault's "counter-sciences" (*OT* 373-386)) such as psychoanalysis and anthropology can be mobilized to critique and fracture the conventional stability of university discourse. Further, throughout their respective oeuvres both thinkers share a continued commitment to interdisciplinary research, allowing philosophy or critical theory to be thought in an expanded and collaborative sense.

Cook stages a provisional encounter between the two intellectual giants, as she asserts as a coda for her study—via Nietzsche by way of Adorno—that "[one] who seeks to mediate between two bold thinker's stamps [oneself] as mediocre" (*AF* IV; *MM* 74; *GS* 228). The idea of a comparative study often contains within itself a veiled hierarchy: of the supposed primacy of one thinker (or their method) over and against the other. Particularly, in the cases of Adorno and Foucault, such attempts to reconcile, or mediate differences under a broader rubric of sameness (either conceptual or methodological) ends up reproducing the same "identity-thinking" both thinkers sought to combat (*ND* 4-12).

Many intellectual histories of critical theory seek to decode, or explain, a theorist by way of their prior (often latent) philosophical-intellectual lineage or influences—such as, reducing Adorno to a "Marxist" or Foucault to a "Nietzschean." With respect to the Frankfurt School, most intellectual histories supply a linear developmental narrative in which one generation is

1 Adorno reads the tradition of Enlightenment as progressing by way of the material-historical "domination of nature," that is, as the suppression of sensuous particularity and "non-identity" in favour of the universality of the philosophical concept (*ND*, 22- 28). Adorno's critical-dialectical mode of thinking endeavours to develop a mode of thinking that "respects nature's heterogeneity" (*AF*, 156), that is, a more porous model of philosophy able to do justice to both identity and difference. For more on Adorno in relation to questions of nature and ecology, see Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (2011).

proceeded by the next as the concept of “critical theory” is progressively refined (i.e., Habermas as the successor and refiner of Adorno). Such diachronic historicism is precisely what many in the Frankfurt school, particularly Benjamin, sought to combat: what is required are constellations which read history “against the grain,” and comparisons which “blast open the continuum of history” (*SW 4*: 392; 395). What is needed is a theory of correspondence: a model of intellectual history which interrogates thinkers in constellation, utilizing comparison to reciprocally illuminate what Adorno calls the “force-field” (*NL 1*: 13) subtending ever intellectual position. Cook can be seen as a forerunner in the English-speaking world in this regard, as she moves towards a model of intellectual development thought in terms of synchronic affinities, against the diachronic progression of influence studies. Such a model allows one to consider speculative and innovative constellations which transgress pre-established (or national) lines of intellectual inquiry. One could imagine similar studies on Adorno and other giants of French theory (Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard), or between Foucault and other members of the Frankfurt School, such as Benjamin. What is essential is not the particular comparisons drawn, nor the affinities or differences analyzed between several thinkers, but rather, the ability to form new and speculative constellations between diverse intellectual positions; gestures which allow the intellectual tradition to be seen as continually open and alive with respect to our present and its concerns. In this way, Cook joins the Enlightenment spirit of Adorno and Foucault as thinkers who probe and work upon the limits of academic inquiry.

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REVIEWS

Review of Sebastian Matzner, *Rethinking Metonymy: Literary Theory and Poetic Practice from Pindar to Jakobson*, Oxford University Press, 2016. 365 pp. ISBN 9780198724285

Review article by Tyler Jordan, *Western University*

Sebastian Matzner's work *Rethinking Metonymy: Literary Theory and Poetic Practice from Pindar to Jakobson* sets out to illuminate the problems which plague current critical approaches to metonymy and to develop a theory of metonymy (both of its structure and poetic effects) as a distinct poetic trope, claiming that metonymy has "received so little attention in literary stylistics and rhetorical tropology" and has become "the forgotten trope" (4). After a brief introduction in which Matzner sets up the book's main goals and states his reliance on Russian formalist theory, especially defamiliarization and Jakobson's placement of metaphor and metonymy on opposite ends of the tropical spectrum, he provides an in-depth theorisation of metonymy throughout the book's chapters.

In chapter 2, Matzner discusses the problems with standard theories of metonymy. He begins by elucidating tendencies to valorize metaphor, which has led the subordination of metonymy (and other tropes) to metaphor. However, Matzner ultimately concludes that the poetic effect of metaphor is more striking than that of metonymy (282). He notes that throughout the theoretical literature from Aristotle onwards, there has been a tendency to use terminology loosely, which has caused confusion as to the difference between various tropes (and sometimes even 'trope' and 'figure' are misused). The second half of the chapter outlines a preliminary theory of metonymy that will be used in the following chapter. Here, metonymy is theorised as a trope which operates based on 'lexical contiguity', or of semantic fields, which Matzner (re) defines as groups of words which are collocated in ordinary language. Thus, metonymy functions as a "shift within a semantic field" (281). In this way, metonymy is characterised by "pragmatically determined association" whereas metaphor is characterised by abstract logical association (52).

In Chapter 3, the author applies his preliminary definition of metonymy to Greek and German poetry (especially of Pindar, Aeschylus, and Hölderlin) in order to develop more fully a theory of metonymy. The major locus of this chapter consists of developing a set of terms that can be used in analysing metonyms and defining three types of metonymy. For the former, Matzner imports terminology familiar from metaphor; he suggests analysing metonyms as composed of a ‘metonymic vehicle’ (MV) and ‘metonymic tenor’ (MT). Through a close analysis of metonyms in Greek and German poetry, the author develops the categories of ‘index metonymy’, ‘amplification metonymy’, and ‘grammatical metonymy’ (which includes both grammatical index metonyms and grammatical amplification metonyms). Index metonyms operate when a semantically abrasive MV is present and refers to a semantically collocated MT which is not present in the sequence. A major aesthetic effect of index metonyms is defamiliarization and Matzner claims that the strength of this effect is correlated with the complexity of the metonym, so that the common metonym of *beds* for ‘sexual acts’ is less striking than, for instance, the use of “*perforated labor* of bees” for ‘honeycomb’ (Pi. P. 6.54; italics are the author’s). Matzner stresses how the interaction between the metonymic vehicle and the context determines the interpretation of the tenor, *contra* metaphor, where the context does not affect the tenor’s interpretation (74–5).

In amplification metonymy, the MV and MT are both present in the verbal sequence and connected through the genitive case. For example: “... After he cut off Eurystheus’ head with *the edge* [MV] *of his sword* [MT]” (Pi. P. 9.80–1; 82). “The main aesthetic consequence” of amplification metonyms “is additional emphasis and focus...giv[ing] an intensified impression of what is at issue while at the same time adding to ‘the bigger picture’ in the metonymic tenor which is co-present in the partitive genitive” (83). Grammatical metonymy, in contradistinction with the noun-based forms discussed above, is adjective based and parallels the distinction between index and amplification metonymy. In the former, “adjectives...point to nouns that need to be inferred or become the inferred noun themselves by changing their grammatical status”, and in the latter, the adjectives “amplify the intensity of a sequence by shifting their grammatical allegiance within a semantic unit” (107–8).

The final section of chapter 3 addresses ‘metonymic presences’, in which Matzner discusses examples where a “metonymic presence is felt

that eludes straightforward and unambiguous classification as an instance of metonymy proper” (123). This investigation touches on several literary and theoretical issues such as passages which feature metaphor and metonymy in interaction (illustrated by a close tropological reading of the beginning of the parados from Sophocles’ *Antigone*), personification, and ‘conditional metonymy’. One important contribution for tropology from this section is Matzner’s persuasive argument that synecdoche, which has been traditionally considered “a distinct phenomen[on] of poetic language,” is in fact best understood as a form of metonymy, as it shares both the same structural form and aesthetic effects of metonymy, noting that, in his theorisation, Jakobson had already subsumed synecdoche under metonymy (164).

In chapter 4, Matzner discusses the implications of his theory of metonymy in translation studies, stylistic criticism, and in (post-)structuralist criticism. This (lengthy) section is largely concerned with analysing how the translations respond to the different types of metonymy present in the original and how translations introduce tropical elements where none exists in the original. The major conclusion of this section is that it is generally possible to translate metonyms verbatim, except where cultural or grammatical limitations prevent the possibility, which proves “*per contrarium* [Matzner’s] fundamental definition of metonymy as a shift in a semantic field established through regular collocation in ordinary usage” (251). He also argues that the target language’s ability to inflect or compound words does not seem to have a significant impact on the translatability of metonyms. Matzner closes the chapter by tackling the implications his theory of metonymy has for stylistic criticism and (post-) structuralist theory. In the realm of stylistic criticism, Matzner hopes that his theory can facilitate the study of tropology in author-, period-, and genre-specific studies with a higher precision.

Matzner’s monograph offers a thorough and systematic study of metonymy as a poetic trope that is structurally distinct from metaphor. The argumentation is clear and offers a convincing account of the structure of metonymy and of its poetic effects. The book is predominantly marketed towards classicists (it is, after all, part of the series “Classics in Theory” and is predominantly engaged in an analysis of Greek poetry and translations of Greek poetry), yet the contents will also be appreciated as a valuable study by those with interests in literary theory or stylistics (especially tropology) as well

as in translation studies and semiotics. Its major accomplishment is offering those who work in these fields a single, well-defined theory of metonymy which will alleviate any confusion caused by the lack of clear theorisation it has received. All the original Greek, Latin, and German quotations are accompanied by an English translation which most times offers a literal rendering of the tropological language so that knowledge of Greek, Latin, and German is not a prerequisite for the reader.

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APPENDIX

CALL FOR PAPERS AND REVIEWS

The Scattered Pelican, Summer 2021

The Scattered Pelican (the graduate journal of comparative literature) invites the submission of scholarly papers and critical book reviews for the academic year 2021-2022.

The Scattered Pelican's guiding principle is to present new scholarship that is pluralistic in regard to methods, approaches, and objects of study within the framework of comparative praxis. It also encourages active and conscious pursuit of scholarship that enlarges the space of the discipline of comparative literature through deep engagement with a broad range of media, novel applications of critical theory, and primary texts in their original languages.

Related fields of interest may include (but are not limited to): Cultural studies, Digital Humanities, Disability Studies, Environmental Studies, Film Studies, History, Linguistics, Literary Studies, Philosophy, Postcolonial Studies, Queer and gender studies, Media studies, Theory & Criticism, Visual Arts, Translation Studies.

Submission Guidelines

The Scattered Pelican accepts full-length journal articles (4000-5000 words) and book reviews (1000-1500 words) in English, French, and Spanish. The word count must be inclusive of the Works Cited and endnotes, and all texts must follow the MLA style (8th edition).

Please include your name, abstract keywords, institutional affiliation, and a 50-word bio in your email. Kindly send your completed papers to thescatteredpelican@gmail.com

To maintain the integrity of the anonymous peer-review process, please ensure that all personal information and identifying marks are removed from your submission. We look forward to reading your submissions!

The Scattered Pelican Editorial Team

