

DREAMS, ILLUSIONS, AND OTHER REALITIES

12TH ANNUAL THEMATIC OPTION RESEARCH CONFERENCE APRIL 7 AND 8, 2009

He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it.

- Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

- Albert Einstein

Dreams are excursions into the limbo of things, a semi-deliverance from the human prison.

- Henri Amiel

It is natural for man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts...

For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth, to know the worst, and to provide for it.

- Patrick Henry

There are intangible realities which float near us, formless and without words; realities which no one has thought out, and which are excluded for lack of interpreters.

- Natalie Clifford Barney

Beware that you do not lose the substance by grasping at the shadow.

- Aesop

Once I dreamed I was a butterfly, and now I no longer know whether I am Chuang Tzu, who dreamed I was a butterfly, or whether I am a butterfly dreaming that I am Chuang Tzu.

- Chuang Tzu

Don't part with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live.

- Mark Twain

Background and Purpose

The Thematic Option Honors Program, part of USC College of Letters, Arts & Sciences, is the University of Southern California's general education alternative: an interdisciplinary program of academic rigor that encourages exciting and vibrant discussion among its community. Each year approximately 200 outstanding freshmen from all majors participate in a unique combination of core courses, supplemental theme courses, writing classes, and tutorials.

This conference provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to enrich their academic experience by publicly presenting their ideas and research. In response to a general call for papers, Thematic Option students developed topics under the theme "Dreams, Illusions, and Other Realities" to be presented as part of a panel. Topics are reflective of students' various disciplines and interests and focus on issues ranging from politics to popular culture. Each panel is composed of five to six students, with a faculty member or Thematic Option writing instructor serving as the panel's chair and respondent. A question and answer session follows the presentation of papers in each panel.

Student Conference Coordinating Committee

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Colby Kennedy

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Timothy Parker

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Lauren Weinzimmer

Elise Welch

Carrie Williams

Many thanks to the faculty and staff
who have played an integral role in the success
of the Thematic Option Research Conference.

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Once Upon a Time...

Tuesday, April 7
6:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Room B

Julia Cooperman

Making Up a Goodbye: The Relationship of Fiction and Autobiography in Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast*

In his review of Mark Doty's heartbreaking memoir, *Heaven's Coast*, critic Bernard Cooper writes that Doty's metaphors and non-linear plot "embody the unbearable." But could it be that the use of these literary devices in non-fiction does not so much embody but disguise the unbearable? Although devices such as metaphor and jumbled chronology evoke the illusion of reality in novels and films, this paper argues that Doty's metaphors and anti-narrative have the opposite effect in *Heaven's Coast*, fictionalizing Doty's tragic loss of his lover to AIDS. Using *Heaven's Coast* as a primary text, "Making Up a Goodbye" investigates the relationship between reality and fiction. In this paper, the implications of Doty's reliance on literary devices are examined using psychologist Katherine Nelson's essay on memory and the cultural role of narrative, articles on the use of narrative in fiction and film, and literary reviews of *Heaven's Coast*.

Christine Sur

Creating a New Reality: Liberation and Identity in Storytelling

Oppression forces silence and submission on its victims, ranging from racial to gender discrimination. As a group, women have been objectified throughout much of history, treated like docile wives or silent servants to dominating male forces. Life happens to them, taking away their humanity and dignity to act on the world. Such powerlessness is exemplified in the lack of a voice; without one, women have no control over their lives, no direction and no sense of self. In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie is a woman beaten down by several men throughout her life, forced into silence by physical and emotional prisons. I explore the process of Janie's creative power as she speaks throughout the novel as a changed woman, using storytelling to recount her past. Because of this communication, Janie is able to fulfill a longing for self-revelation, and her use of oral tradition brings liberation and self-identity. This personal transformation creates a new reality for both narrator and listener, with the power to enact social shifts by empowering readers with new understanding.

Alexandra G. Tilsley

Extra, Extra! The Role of News in Creating Reality in *Tropic of Orange*

A city breeds news. In Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, there are two professional journalists and one on-the-ground reporter, and these three characters are responsible for finding and reporting all the news that lives in Los Angeles. There is a writer, Gabriel, who reports on in-depth investigations; a broadcast journalist, Emi, who reports on breaking news; and a citizen, Buzzworm, who picks up news tips from the streets, talking to gang members and streets vendors. The three of them each experience a different reality and each report on a different reality. These different layers of reality, then, come together to create a whole reality. These layers, however, can never truly be viewed at once, so the whole reality can never be understood. The characters in the novel try to bridge the gap using technology, but ultimately reporting and news hinges on talking to people and on being there, and without witnessing and experiencing news no one can truly understand a reality or the relationship between realities. Reporters all present different and accurate realities which, when brought together would represent a whole reality of the city. This reality, however, can never truly be seen or understood.

Illusions of Knowing in *Six Degrees of Separation*

This paper examines John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* and explains how the play illustrates the unfortunate triumph of superficial information and anecdotes over authentic knowledge and experiences. Most notably, Paul successfully gains entrance into Ouisa and Flan Kittredges' lives by dropping names and telling anecdotes. Paul implies that these details are informational tips of icebergs of knowledge; by play's end, however, it becomes clear that no icebergs of knowledge exist beneath the artifice of Paul's charming words. Yet, while Paul is the principal exploiter of superficial information, his actions reveal the trivialization of knowledge in the Kittredges' society. Indeed, Ouisa ultimately realizes that reducing every authentic experience into "an anecdote with no teeth and a punch line," inhibits growth by reaffirming rather than broadening existing perspectives. In this light, this paper explores Mike Vanden Heuvel's interpretation of "parasite information theory," which asserts that Paul's parasitism on and disruption of the Kittredges' orderly "system of social codes" creates, "new and more complex forms of order." Paul's illusions of knowing are the catalyst for Ouisa's revelation about the dangers of trivializing experience as well as her ultimate refusal to, "turn [Paul] into an anecdote."

Frances Yen

**Education, Narration, and Reality:
Points of View in *Never Let Me Go***

Rising numbers of people pursuing higher education these days demonstrate that our society increasingly stresses the importance of a continuing education. An education has the ability to mold people's minds and shape people's intellects. It can go so far as to affect one's perception of reality; Paulo Freire suggests that one can only view reality based on the form of education one receives. In *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro, the clones are not as concerned with education, although their experience as students turns out to be the largest factor in keeping them docile and cooperative organ donors later in life. I explore not only this phenomenon of oppression through education, but also the way in which the novel itself imitates the indoctrination techniques portrayed in the book. The narrative structure creates the same oppressive experience for the reader as the educational structure at Hailsham does for its students; however, the experience is incomplete as the implied author ultimately condones a different path from the one the characters and the narrator follow.

Rhetorical Questions

Tuesday, April 7
6:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Pub

Emily Friedberg

Inextricable Memories

Through its complex aesthetic elements, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) addresses the moral quandaries surrounding the issues of memory, love, and self-respect. Film analysts Christopher Grau and Carol Vernallis have taken drastically different approaches in interpreting the messages portrayed in *Eternal Sunshine*. While Grau refers to philosophers to supplement the moral questions posed in *Eternal Sunshine*, Vernallis finds the answers by critically examining the film's artistic elements and interpreting them as Gondry and Kaufman seem to have intended to have them interpreted when they created this visual, audio, and psychological web of a film. My argument relies on both Grau and Vernallis' approaches to interpreting the film, but also incorporating Jewish ethics against altering your body as applied to the mind. Ultimately, *Eternal Sunshine* asserts that allowing technology to alter your mind and memories can produce devastating effects and the dreamlike quality of the film allows the viewer to relate to Joel's experiences. The majority of the action takes place in Joel's memories, which allows Gondry to create his musical reality that is as intellectual as it is whimsical.

Nina Gertsvolf

Defending the Defenseless: Promoting Scandal in *Thank You For Smoking*

In the film *Thank You for Smoking* (2006), hot-shot lobbyist Nick Naylor thinks he has it all figured out. As a spokesman for "Big Tobacco," he makes his living defending smokers and cigarette makers in spite of confrontations by health advocates. However, after increased scrutiny from his son and a mishap with an investigative reporter, Naylor begins to rethink his mantra that "if you argue correctly, you're never wrong." I will examine the consequences of the scandal that force Naylor to confront the illusion that work and personal life can be completely separated and deal with the reality of his job. The film illustrates the consequences of selling one's morals for profit when Naylor finally comes face-to-face with the consequences of argumentation.

Morgan Leighton

Geeks and Norms: The Lingo of an Alternate Reality

Carny cant is a fluid language found in carnivals, circuses, and sideshows across the country, and understanding it is the key to entering the insular world of the carnival. Performers use the cant to keep their lives on the back lot separate from the "norms" in the tents. This patchwork language defies classification in dictionaries, lists, and explanations because it has no use as a dead and stagnant language. If carny cant is to keep secrets, it must maintain its mystery by constantly changing. Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* is the story of a family that is itself also a carnival. The Binewski family carnival has many secrets, from their intentional experimentation with birth defects to make their children sideshow acts, to Crystal Lil's former job as the "geek," biting the heads off live chickens. In *Geek Love*, carny cant separates the bizarre Binewski family from the norms, allowing them to keep their secrets and pity everyone who is unfortunate enough to be normal.

Timothy S. McNally

**The Threat and Power of Insanity in
Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying***

Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until
the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the
majority of folks is looking at him when he does it. - Cash, *As I Lay Dying*

Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* are arguably two of the finest novels in the English language and together pose an intriguing question: is sanity merely conformity to a prevailing opinion - an acceptance of a reality that may or may not exist - or an unwillingness to confront the truths that have the power to radically alter the world? Characters written off as "crazy" - Ellison's "Invisible" protagonist or Faulkner's Darl - may be feared and excluded because of their profound gifts of insight into society's flaws. Whereas other characters in these novels accept their present reality, the two "insane" protagonists have the courage and the ability to peer behind the curtain, exposing the truth and threatening to tear down the very societies that have alienated them.

Noa Oldak

**The Effects of Affect Communities:
Embracing the "F-Word"**

Love is often considered an illusory and fictional notion - a distraction from the more tangible "real" world. But, as nature's creatures, humans are inarguably capable of emotion. My exploration of feeling, or as I dub it, the "f-word," demonstrates the significance of sentiment not only on an interpersonal scale but also on the grander universal level. I illustrate the effect of affect through Raymond Williams' notion of "affect communities," in which the human experience is interpreted on the basis of mutual emotional encounter rather than on culture's common categories of race, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the divisions in culture that we see today are replaced by the distinctions between naturally born human beings and clones, while in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, affect communities flourish within a seemingly homogenous African-American society. Ultimately, despite our differences, human beings are tied together by shared oppression, trauma, compassion, and most of all, love - a phenomenon that not only liberates and triggers but also allows us to form inexplicably resilient bonds.

Christina Pushaw

Racial Performativity and Armenian Identity in Los Angeles

The concept of "race" is such a prominent aspect of American society that identification with an ethnic group is a significant component of identity formation. The characteristics and experiences of the Armenian community in Los Angeles can be viewed as a microcosm of a larger phenomenon, revealing that ethnic self-identification, in effect, creates the illusion of racial separateness and contributes to the alternative "realities" perceived by minority ethnic groups in America. To examine the effects of racial performativity, I apply Nella Larsen's *Passing*, as well as criticisms of the novel, to contemporary issues of ethnic identity formation. Tailoring my analysis more specifically to the Los Angeles Armenian community, I explore Harut Sassounian's model of the Armenian diaspora - the identity of the Armenian nation, as distinct from that of the Armenian state.

Castles in the Sky

Tuesday, April 7
6:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

Lee Kraljev

The Importance of Fantasy: Escaping Reality in Children's Literature

Creating fantasies and imaginary worlds is a staple of childhood, but do these alternate realities have a greater purpose or effect? What happens if the child's fantasies cross over to reality, if they become real? Can a child's reality be just as real as what we consider to be the actual reality (is reality as much of an illusion as fantasy is)? And finally, are these made-up realities necessary for children to get through their possibly unhappy lives? In *Coraline* (2009), the main character escapes to an alternate reality, with both positive and negative consequences, while in Lemony Snicket's *The Bad Beginning*, the children remain completely in the real world, with similarly disparate outcomes. Examining children's literature where fantasies, or the lack thereof, play a role can reveal both the necessity and dangers of fantasy.

Matthew Pearce

Never Get Out of the Boat, Unless You Were Going All the Way: The Illusion of War and the Danger of the Reality Behind It in *Apocalypse Now*

This essay discusses the hollow illusions of war and the implications of discovering its reality in Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Adapted from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, Coppola transplants the action to the chaos of the Vietnam War, where Kurtz, a one-time shoe-in for General, has set up his own haven ruling over natives deep in the jungle. Willard, the soldier charged with terminating Kurtz, gradually begins to find what Kurtz discovered as he and his crew cruise upriver towards Kurtz's compound, and the line between right and wrong becomes more and more convoluted. The film raises the issue of the realities of war, as Willard grapples with his assignment amidst the chaos that surrounds him. The presentation shows how the perils of war cause one man to denounce his previous life for madness in the jungle and how the man sent to kill him begins to lose his own grip on reality as he begins to see the same things.

Kelly Teacher

Creating Intimacy Through Individual Realities: Personal Illusions in *Chungking Express*

Wong Kar-Wai's characters in *Chungking Express* (1994) experience the desire for intimacy in a postmodern urban space. Two stories intertwine through the city of Hong Kong and through time, but interactions between the stories are absent. Two cops, 223 and 663, outwardly seem far different than the emotional wreck each become when rejected by their girlfriends. However, the public and private worlds connect in strange ways: a female drug smuggler in a blond wig is the unlikely object of affection of the first cop, a naïve and lovesick young man; a quirky and shy cashier demonstrates her affections for a second cop, who frequents her counter, by secretly redecorating his apartment. These seemingly incompatible and unexpected relationships occur in the city spaces where interactions are spontaneous and random. The film's director, Wong Kar-Wai, commenting on the relationship between the private and public worlds, observes that "a lot of city people have a lot of emotions but sometimes they can't find the people to express them to... Nearly all the characters are hopelessly romantic." The characters have private worlds that are not easily reconciled with the roles they perform in the public world; therefore their interpersonal relationships are superficial and ungrounded. However, the film does not present a pessimistic viewpoint, but rather presents a perspective of "dogged optimism that sees the characters' singleness ('loneliness' isn't the right word) as full of energetic possibility - as an undiminished source for reviving and renewing human connectedness." Because city life facilitates various identities for a single person, connections between characters are often fleeting or nonexistent; however, despite impediment, the characters continue to search for and create intimacy - even if it is illusory.

And Then, She Began to Read Her Conference Paper

Psychologist Julian Jaynes argues that the human brain once existed in two parts: the “executive part called a god” and the “follower part called a man.” Human beings back then could not fathom how their thoughts formed in the executive half of their brain, being aware of them only when they bubbled up into their conscious “follower half.” This led people to believe that this voice in their head - the one that told them what thoughts to think, what decisions to make - was the voice of a higher being calling from a higher level of reality.

Three millennia later, psychologists ask whether schizophrenia today is caused by people reverting to this primitive two-part brain system. If this is so, other levels of consciousness can be dismissed as annoying glitches in people’s systems. But looking at the stories we tell each other - in movies like *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) or books like *The Comforters* - the idea of alternate realities is explored extensively. The protagonists in these stories believe that their “reality” is the same one that everyone else is experiencing, only to discover a parallel universe later on that casts doubt on which world is reality and which is delusion. In light of these texts, can we credit all our “hallucinations” to faulty wiring? Don’t these stories hint at the possibility that we ourselves might be merely characters in our author’s bigger universe?

Jordan Wong

***The Woman Warrior:* Authentic Illusions of a Chinese American**

In her 1976 memoir *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston reflects upon her experiences growing up as a Chinese American. From mythical Chinese stories to volatile relationships with her Chinese parents, Kingston paints a vivid description of a Chinese upbringing in an American society. The conflict between these worlds leaves Kingston in a state of confusion as she attempts to fit both worlds into a world of her own. This uncertainty has become a topic of discord in the literary world as it brings reservations on Kingston’s representation of the Chinese American culture. One of the most outspoken critics, Frank Chin, has reprimanded Kingston for her distortions on the Chinese culture. He criticizes her unrealistic portrayal, claiming her memoir to be an “illusion” of the Chinese culture.

But why does Frank Chin insist on a factual description of Chinese history? After all, Kingston is not wholly Chinese, but rather a Chinese American. Although Chin has attempted to undermine the authenticity of *The Woman Warrior* through its lack of factual accuracy, I use this same argument to demonstrate that it is these accused illusions that are the realisms of the Chinese American culture.

Liar, Liar

Tuesday, April 7
6:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Room E

Sarah Boots

Selective Self-delusion in *Six Degrees of Separation*

The term “hyperreality” describes the inability of the individual to distinguish the original from the copy; Umberto Eco defines the hyperreal as “the authentic fake.” In John Guare’s *Six Degrees of Separation*, Paul is the ultimate authentic fake. He is a young black man with no money, without formal education, and yet still possessing the outward appearance of all the proofs needed for acceptance into the higher social circles of upper East Side New York. His knowledge of those he meets, his opinions, and his manners are all copied from elsewhere; he assimilates them and creates a character for himself. While Paul is the ultimate example of the hyperreal, the upper - class society that he seeks to enter also encourages the production of the hyperreal by demanding more than the real experience can provide - experiences are polished and repeated as anecdotes, better than the original. Ouisa and Flan Kittredge easily embrace the hyperreal, as when they mask their poor relationship with their children by constantly repeating that the children attend Harvard, reducing them to a single, socially acceptable fact. The Kittredges’ hyperreality is treated as more legitimate than Paul’s; they are accepted by society, while he is rejected due to issues of race, class, and sexuality. Both Paul and the Kittredges create illusions for themselves based only on what they wish to see: the Kittredges see meaning in their lives, and Paul sees himself as the beloved son of upper-class parents. Ultimately, these fictions are confronted by reality and are shattered when they come into contact with facts.

Genevieve Hoffman

The Road to Revolution

History is fraught with the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. Whether it be the mother country and her colonies, the State and a group of dissenters, or slave master and slave, the oppressor must inevitably create an illusion to keep the oppressed under his control: the illusion that the oppressed ones are really free, the illusion that the oppressed somehow benefit in remaining under the oppressor’s control, or the illusion that the oppressed is somehow unworthy and deserves no better. In Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Tim O’Brien’s “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” the characters Celie and Mary Anne (respectively) are oppressed. Conditioned by society, circumstance, and their upbringing to believe what their oppressors want them to believe: in Celie’s case, that she is of no account because she is black, poor, uneducated, and a woman; and in Mary Anne’s case, that her destiny is to marry and have children. Drawing on Chela Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness and Hakim Bey’s idea of the “Temporary Autonomous Zone,” I will explore both women’s paths to freedom and how they relate to the overall process of revolution: what is required for the oppressed to break free of the illusions their oppressors have spun and the consequences of that freedom.

Nicolas Kendall-Bar

Who Buys the Illusionist’s Illusions?: How Lying is the Western Character’s Most Important Skill

Although our image of the Western hero is a man whose talents lie in violence and brute force, the subtler art of telling tall tales often turns out to be more important. From the original Western novels like *The Virginian* to the post-modern *Blood Meridian*, the standard Western hero has had to possess an extensive knowledge of both nature and his place in it, to avoid being tricked by other men. The hero also needs to know how to spin a story based on illusion, assert his dominance over other men, and avoid violent conflict. The accomplished storyteller connects real world fact to falsehood to create a believable narrative that will ensnare the mind of the gullible. A good liar will always recognize what his audience wants to hear; he will tell a hungry man of food or a jobless one of work, and the man will hang on to his every word. In the Western, telling tall tales demonstrates an ability even more impressive than quick gun play and, as nearly all information on the frontier passes by word of mouth, it gives the illusionist immense power through the monopoly of information.

The Necessity of Illusory Fame

Ideally, the culmination of a life's worth of scandal and shameless self-promotion is renown; however, this fame is transitory at best. This transience is because fame merely functions to impose unrealistic expectations upon celebrities who are seen as marketable commodities, which we as the audience idolize. These objects of our admiration are held to unreal standards that are nearly impossible to attain. Consequently, by fiat, the objects of fame are forced to create and perpetuate an illusion of perfection to market themselves. These concepts are illustrated in both *Gossip Girl* and *Chicago*, which function as contemporary examples of the complex nature of fame and the lengths that people are compelled to go in order to achieve stardom. In one case, the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family works to preserve the image of a quintessential socialite as her minion attempts to emulate her. In the other text, two women aspire to clinch stardom which pits them in a factious publicity war against one another. In both examples, deceptions and illusions run rampant as necessities for the survival in a fame-intensive society, thereby preventing an accurate perception of the world.

Matthew Salvatore

Smoke and Mirrors: Distortion, Illusion, and Self-Deception in *Memento*

John Locke calls identity "the principle of individuation" (*principium individuationis*), the determination of existence to any being at any particular time and place, or what Fredric Jameson would say is the unattainable goal to which all humans strive in the postmodern world. The format and plot of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* enhances the viewer's understanding of the illusory nature of human memory and affirms the assertions of John Locke and Fredric Jameson; the film shows us how the postmodern condition of our psyche is responsible for our distant and technology-dependent relationship to our own history and how this disjunction ultimately exacerbates the distortion and deception within ourselves. Jameson's theory provides the underlying support to the argument that the postmodern world fosters a concocted perception of memory in humans because our technology diminishes our personal connection to the past. Our technology provides us with what we believe is substantial evidence in the form of tattoos, photographs, notes, and other media that we must link together in some cohesive and relatable form. Rosalind Sibielski's research ties John Locke's Theory of Principium Individuationis to the seemingly contradictory notions of Jameson's postmodern theory. Nolan, Jameson, and Locke compel us to question where the truth lies and to examine how we allow our minds to reign over our image of ourselves and our world.

Outside the Lines

Tuesday, April 7
7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Room B

Madison Chase

A Snapshot into the Life of the Abnormal

Cathy Day was born and raised in the circus town of Peru, Indiana, where her novel *The Circus in Winter* takes place. At the start of each of her short stories, Day includes a real-life image of the circus performer she writes about. Although her chapters are fictional, they provide a greater understanding into the psyche of the performers of The Great Porter Circus, and allow the reader to experience the circus from a point-of-view that the audience in the bleachers cannot see. For example, Jennie Dixianna, the star acrobat, is humanized from a seductive and flexible temptress to a battered runaway from an abusive life in the Mississippi Bayou. In her novel, Day uses her abnormal characters to celebrate the small town and the commonality in all of us. On the other hand, notorious photographer Diane Arbus chose to photograph those on the outskirts of society to rebel against the normal and to celebrate our differences. In Arbus's photographs of fire-eaters and Princess Sahloo the snake charmer, Hubert's museum's main attractions perform for the camera. Despite her subject's willing participation, many art critics condemn Arbus for taking advantage of society's outcasts. Over the years, Arbus created intense relationships with the people she photographed. She was curious about the details of her subject's lives, their willingness to reveal their secrets, and the thrilling discomfort she felt during these interactions. Both Day and Arbus agree that there is much more to the sideshow performers that audiences ogle at and that, believe it or not, we have a little bit of freak inside all of us.

Michael Hergenrader

"Time to Die":

***Blade Runner* and Man's Apocalyptic Creation of Self**

There is a similarity spread across mankind: the need to differentiate ourselves from others. This compulsion stems from each individual's desire to comprehend what he represents. Once he achieves this understanding, his existence seems meaningful because he feels a secure attachment to the world. When others feel the same way, this outlook seems even more justified, so people create institutions based on common ideology - this theory becomes a group identity that each person unconditionally associates himself with and defends. While this like-mindedness may seem beneficial, there is actually an underlying danger to it: in order to justify one's own race, religion, or ideology and give it power, the individual destroys other competing ones. The film *Blade Runner* (1982) highlights this through the interracial conflict between humans and replicants, artificial beings whose distinction from the humans is minute. Evoking support for the persecuted replicants, the movie illustrates that the human race is naturally self-destructive and apocalyptic. Under the illusion that we are different from everyone, we mistakenly annihilate those that are the same as us. In the essay, I will examine not only the conflict of *Blade Runner* but also various occurrences of my thesis in real life. I will discuss, for example, the Nazi party's "final solution," the Christian Identity movement of today, and the polarizing ideologies of the Cold War, a conflict that almost eliminated human existence.

Amanda Blaze Pillon

Virtually Reality:

Web Groups As Imagined, Yet Valid, Online Communities

This essay discusses the validity of online chat and gaming groups as both imagined and real communities, drawing upon a collection of articles compiled by Peter Ludlow in *Crypto Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias* as well as the true story of Indra Sinha, a man who gets caught up in the online world he creates in *The Cybergypsies*, to demonstrate that what happens in the virtual world often can and does spill over into the reality that happens outside of a computer. The idea of the "imagined community" is loosely based upon the concepts of Benedict Anderson, who states that an imagined feeling of community is the key ingredient to Nationalism. In effect, the feelings of loyalty or duty toward a nation have been simulated within this type of

Internet community because the basis for them is the same. That events that take place within a virtual reality can in turn affect the real world reveals that the Internet is not just a community that exists within the imagination, but an extension of reality.

Jacqueline E. Swaidan

“the beautiful machines...the one altered movement that will make them maniac”:

Machine vs. Imagination in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*

In Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Billy's West, in contrast to the West of Frederick Jackson Turner's *Frontier Thesis*, is a rapidly shrinking desert hemmed in by encroaching civilization and technology of all sorts: new railroads, telegraph lines, clocks, light bulbs, and Perry shutter cameras. Distance is shorter, time is finite, starlight is obsolete, and photographs compete with words to describe it all. The mythic West of the imagination is dying, as is the possibility for imagination at all, replaced by the gears and cogs of the Industrial Revolution. All this threatening machinery first invades the land of the West. It frightens humans with its dangerous and uncontrollable independence, and soon even begins to reproduce itself. It finally seeps into the very bodies of Ondaatje's characters in an attempt to destroy the creative minds within. The fear of machines was a common trend in Victorian literature of Billy's lifetime, and Ondaatje juxtaposes this fear with another contemporary to us: the computer. Ondaatje's historical parallels show that then, as now, humans feared that their creativity, imagination, and the dreams and illusory worlds created through fiction would be sacrificed to the whirr and click of a monotone metal machine.

Emily Hella Tsaconas

Claiming Place, Creating Space:

The Reconstruction of Reality “Not Somewhere Else But Here” in the Work of Adrienne Rich

As a radical feminist, Adrienne Rich is disinterested in reforming systems, instead rejecting the dominant reality of her mainstream cultural context. Rich believes that the important feminist work of capturing the stories of women that would otherwise be lost, forgotten, or forever untold must be done in a completely new forum. Rich does not desire to build this new reality in a place far removed from the patriarchal society it aspires to combat, but rather within the same location that the established system exists, using physical place as the raw materials for a radical cultural reconstruction. The fidelity to the concrete reality of physical location in Rich's poems is what gives strength and substance to the seemingly abstract process of so-called creating space. In their ties to particular established places, Rich's newly imagined spaces become accessible to an audience beyond the “secret circle” inhabited by the artist and her subject to a larger audience of women, a shift that engenders a sense of community within the space. It is in the context of such community that the personal is able to become political and that ideas of recuperation and recreation can transcend the realm of dreams into one of existence. Through her careful negotiation of relationships between place and space, the untold and misrepresented narratives Rich wishes to expose and reclaim in her poetry are given a place in which to gather, and it is through this common ground that the work of recreating reality can take place on a significant and meaningful scale.

Nate Wong

Coming Out of the Shrieking Shack:

Werewolves and Queer Theory in *Harry Potter*

For a story about an adolescent wizard who saves the world from the forces of dark magic, *Harry Potter* is an extraordinarily ordinary story, addressing many issues that society faces today. But while controversial issues such as incest and feminism are discussed, the issue of homosexuality is never explicitly addressed in the series. However, the books can be interpreted to contain implicit references to homosexuality, most notably through a comparison to werewolves. The social marginalization that werewolves face throughout the *Harry Potter* series is not unlike that faced by the LGBT community at present. In both societies, fear of the terrifying Other contributes to sustaining false beliefs about gays and werewolves. Marginalization in the media also largely contributes to this “otherization”, perpetuating false stereotypes to the masses. The refusal to challenge traditional norms of what constitutes love, productivity, and family are among the similar stigmas that both gays and werewolves face. *Harry Potter* is no doubt an extraordinary magical tale, but one that challenges readers to think about very ordinary issues.

Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes

Tuesday, April 7
7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Pub

Gieselle Allen

You're One in Eight Million: Lost in the Search of the American Dream

When a person sits down in a movie theatre, there is one thing he or she expects the film to provide them with for the next two hours: an escape. You expect to escape to a world that is larger than life, filled with your own problems, but magnified into a larger, magical scale. One of the dreams that is frequently represented in these films is the "American Dream," the idea that every American has the freedom and ability to achieve their goals. Although having a goal is beneficial for most people, we are sometimes presented with characters that are willing to go too far to achieve these goals. By examining the role of the search for the American Dream in *The Naked City* (1948) and *Chicago* (2002), I demonstrate the fact that although the characters in these films believe they are ascending to their dreams, they are actually descending into a world of depravity. In this presentation, I will examine how the filmmakers critique the pitfalls of following the American Dream and how the pursuit of the American Dream is ultimately the cause of many people's emotional, moral, and physical demise.

Nicholas DeSantis

Apocalypse How: The True Forces Behind the Vietnam War in *The Quiet American*

As an MI6 agent, Graham Greene traveled the world using his identity as a world renowned author to hide his intentions as a spy. Drawing from his experience in Vietnam, Greene wrote *The Quiet American*, a story centered around the bombing of a Saigon square. Shortly after the bombing took place, a picture was run in Life magazine of the bloody destruction the bombing caused. This picture and almost all information about the event are nearly impossible to track down, leaving Greene's book as one of the only readily accessible accounts of the event. In *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene blurs the line between what is real and what is merely an illusion of fiction. Was the bombing really set up by American spies to throw America's sympathy towards war with Vietnam? Is it American nature to rush to the rescue, without questioning how much their help is needed? By creating a fictitious world around a devastating event few people know anything about, Greene's story effectively becomes the reality.

Andrew Hosea

Illusions of the Republican Party: Nixon's "Silent Majority" to Palin's "Real America"

Politicians within the Republican Party often emphasize the bucolic small town aspect of America while overlooking the bustling urban component of it. Starting in 1972 with Richard Nixon's rise to power and his "Silent Majority," conservatives have valued one America over another. These quiet god-fearing suburbanites became the true face of America - not loud-mouthed anti-war and civil rights protesters. The "Silent Majority" of hard working rural types did not whine about their lives, they took the impetus upon themselves to change it - epitomizing the Republican Party's romanticized individuality. The common man was a symbol of self-reliance, and was simultaneously a hunter, a fisherman and a cowboy. Prominent Republican politicians have adopted this "cowboy hat" image as their own, notably Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and most recently, Sarah Palin. While Palin's "real America" may have been an accurate representation of the past, this nostalgia hardly represents America today. Four out of every five Americans live in urban areas, and the small-town farms of the past have been replaced by large-scale agribusiness. The conservative conception of America no longer exists, making the continual use of such imagery likely to alienate voters and hamper the Republican Party's prospects at future political success.

Stephen Shocket

**Not as Lowbrow as It Seems:
Art in Carnival Advertisements**

Though it represents a variety of ideals for each person uniquely, the carnival is consistent in providing an alternative world in which to get lost - this exciting, scary, and strange world is what draws in audiences each year. Equally as bizarre, if not more so, are the striking and creative works of art that advertise carnivals. These posters are unfortunately appreciated by only very few, and are rarely considered substantial art pieces. Thus, the question remains: why would an aspiring artist abandon his attempt to "make it" as a respected artist to instead live with carny-folk, painting similar things year after year? The touching story of the carnival advertiser and artist Jeremy Trainer in Cathy Day's *The Circus in Winter* provides insight into the other side of the poster. The character of Trainer, while almost completely fictional, allows a closer look at the artists behind these glitzy advertisements.

Felicia Yang

Übermensch, Technology, and the Destruction of Human Nature

Betrayal is commonly thought of as the defiance of trust in a relationship between people, but this phenomenon is not limited to interpersonal relationships; it also exists within society as a whole. Through exploration of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and *Gattaca* (1997), a common theme of exploitation of technology in pursuit of an image of perfection is evident. In these films, society has implemented means to selectively erase memories and to genetically engineer offspring. It is this use of technology which betrays our human nature in an effort to elevate the population to a higher, albeit unrealistic, standard. Nietzsche's ideas regarding the Übermensch, the superhuman race, can be applied as the philosophical foundation and motivation behind this abuse of technology and its consequential betrayal of our human spirit and our fundamental social nature.

He Said, She Said

Tuesday, April 7
7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Banquet Room

Seth Adams

It's Harry Potter not Hilary Potter: Gender Issues and Power Conflicts in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Dolores Umbridge is despicable, irritable, and foul, or so the narrator leads the reader to believe as she follows the lives of Harry and his friends. However, Harry, as a teenage male, may not be the best judge of Dolores' character as he is locked in a power struggle with her regarding the truth about Lord Voldemort's return. What are the implications of the "evil" Umbridge being a woman and does that affect Harry's and others' views of her? Is Harry Potter an example of the abused and misjudged fighting back? Or is he merely an ego-bruised, testosterone-filled male seeking to restore his own high position? To what extent is he, a student, subverting the authority of the High Inquisitor, and is he justified in his actions? This is not a clear-cut war of the sexes, however, as Hermione supports Harry's defiance of the new female authority and Minister Cornelius Fudge is the one supplying Umbridge with this newfound power. The issue is further complicated by J. K. Rowling's unveiling of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore's sexuality, a man whose position Umbridge is attempting to usurp. These conflicts evolve and interact throughout the novel and serve as great evidence to the nuances of gender and their effects on the authority and power.

Connor Flanagan

"This is the Girl": Gender Performativity and Fantasy in *Mulholland Drive*

As Judith Butler argues in her landmark postfeminist text *Gender Trouble*, gender identity is a discursively constructed concept, devoid of any true meaning or natural grounding. Thus, a person's gender is nothing more than a set of acts performed to fit into the heterosexual matrix of culture. While Butler ultimately calls for gender parody and "trouble" as a solution to this problematic system, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) presents the painful reality of such acts and in doing so reveals the comforting nature of gender performativity. In Lynch's film, the gender-troubled Diane Selwyn utilizes fantasy to imagine herself successfully performing a stable gender identity that allows her to experience the happiness and power she lacks as a woman and as a lesbian in the "real" world. However, the film's conclusion in this "real" world, where her gender struggle is harshly counterpointed with the easy gender performativity of Camilla/Rita, exposes Diane's fantasy as ultimately a tragic failure: fantasy is not enough to save her from the painful effects of gender trouble.

Shipra Gupta

The Conception and Caging in Childhood Innocence

As notorious psychologist Bruno Bettelheim points out in his introduction to *The Uses of Enchantment*, fairy tales, by and large, function as one of the best tools that children can use to learn about the meaning of life because these timeless stories explore normal human problems. For the most part, fairy tale retellings such as Disney's animated version of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), largely stay true to the same basic stories set up by their predecessors - no matter whether they are a few years old or a few centuries old. But when passing down the framework of an older story, the societal constructions (i.e. patriarchy) that influenced the original also find their way through to the next generation. Angela Carter, however, questions tradition with "The Tiger's Bride" - a sexual coming-of-age story modeled around "Beauty and the Beast." Carter consciously blurs the lines between good and evil, blameless and blameful, and finally, adulthood and adolescence in order to illustrate the ambiguities within our society. By engaging with both Carter's text and the Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* I will discuss whether our conception of children as innocent (a notion deeply rooted in Victorian culture), still has relevance in the world that we live in today.

**Becoming the Ideal Male:
An American Psycho's Violent Ascension Up the Ladder of Hegemonic Masculinity**

This paper on Mary Harron's film adaptation of *American Psycho* (2000) investigates the many cultural influences that drive Patrick Bateman, a self-absorbed, twenty-seven-year-old yuppie, during his reckless campaign of violence and sexual aggression in upper class Manhattan. By focusing upon Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which asserts that gender is an entirely impersonal, culturally derived act, I analyze Bateman's attempt to personify the qualities of an ideal male in contemporary American society: a domineering symbol of physical strength, social influence, and sexual prowess. Whether he is demonstrating his affinity for popular music, pornography, skin care ointments, or Hollywood horror films, Patrick Bateman's every word and action is derived not from his inner mind or soul, but from products of the morally-collapsed, post-modern world that he inhabits. I strive to evaluate the reasons for and the consequences of Bateman's perverted effort to personify society's vision of the alpha male. Furthermore, I address the issue of whether Bateman's psychotic journey is real or if it is merely a fantastical product of his culturally tainted mind. Probing deep beneath the surface of Patrick Bateman's impressively chiseled exterior, will any substantive qualities be found? Or is his identity as a figure of masculine power nothing but a performance?

Zoe A. Weintraub

The Quiet Revolution in the Bedroom and in Conversation

Whether it was by means of tumbling in the sheets or tumbling in the streets, women of Eighteenth Century France did not see the results they expected after the revolution regarding their equality. However, their work did not, and should not go unnoticed. Women began transferring their power from the position of mistresses of the royal highnesses, to dictating political decisions and appointing ministers. Their progress through *Le Journal des Dames*, the overseeing of the salons, the orchestrating of riots, as well the increased publication of novels laid the groundwork for future progress. By examining the fictional depiction of the aristocracy and perception of elite women in Choderlos de Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, I will assert the relationship between a woman's power of sexual manipulation to their transition to influence in societal relations. Additionally, Laclos' novel gives further evidence for the feminist movement's failure to meet its expected potential. Through his lack of detailing the classes outside of the elite, Laclos represents the view of many of the aristocratic sector. This lends support to the notion that it was the failure of women to put class aside and unite as a collective community that stunted the greater progress of the feminist movement.

I've Lost My Humanity, Can I Have Yours?

Tuesday, April 7
7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Room D

Aaron Baygell

Drilling Upon the Family Bond in *There Will Be Blood*

The effect of greed and dishonesty upon relationships continues to break families apart. No clearer than in Paul Thomas Anderson's *There Will Be Blood* (2007) is this destruction evident as we observe Daniel Plainview, a man who seemingly exists to do nothing but find and sell oil. Through examination of his interactions with many of the characters on screen, this paper demonstrates with careful and provocative analysis how Plainview loses his family, the one thing that formed his anchor to humanity. For as he works to gain power, Plainview becomes anything but the family man that he once portrayed himself to be.

Lauren Adele Dawson

The Tyranny of Good Intentions: Unintended Ethical Dilemmas in *Never Let Me Go*

In his novel *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro examines the "tyranny of good intentions" with the all-too-real possibility of human cloning and its potential as a human rights nightmare. The novel reveals how the abuses of language can be used to perpetuate human rights violations by changing the limits of what defines human. In this paper, I explore how the novel reduces identity to an externally constructed illusion, thereby revealing how easily anyone could find himself on the other side of human. I also discuss how, through carefully constructed language, even blatantly immoral unintended consequences can be allowed to persist - and "how easily human life is annulled." Moreover, I will address the inherent need for accountability in scientific advances by exploring the societal and individual ramifications of human cloning as presented in the novel.

Jennifer Fong

Lord Voldemort, You Ain't Got No Soul Power

Throughout history, civilizations have devised their own conceptions of the soul. Some tie it to the spirit of a person, while others view it as a vehicle to spiritual redemption in present or future lives. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when Lord Voldemort cleaves his soul into not two, not three, but seven parts, he has "pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed". But has he also pushed the limits of humanity in doing so?

"You Ain't Got No Soul Power" touches upon the notions of life, the body, and the soul across time and cultures, and how these three entities interact. Beyond this, however, it seeks to identify the role of the soul in people - particularly storybook villains - and how it plays upon the social constructs that govern our understanding of humanity. Lord Voldemort's success as a villain suggests that there are realms to life beyond the soul. Given this, how much is the concept of the soul simply an illusion?

Sarah Francis

The Perpetual War for Vietnam Vets: Investigating a Man's Disillusionment and Failures in *The Human Stain*

The war does not end when the fighting stops. When the treaties are made and conclusions are drawn, war rages inside of the men who fight for us and threatens the life of these men who survive the combat. Les Farley is one of these men; he is

America's hero. He jeopardizes his life to defend our right to life, liberty, and happiness, but he comes home like many other soldiers still in the heat of the battle and unable to disassociate the horrors of his past from the reality of his life. For Les, his life at home is an alternate reality because he cannot stop living in Vietnam, the war he was forced to join. He loses his hope of fulfilling his American Dream for following the rules and obeying the government when years later we elect a president who was a draft dodger. Les Farley may have murdered his wife and her lover, but he is not responsible, we are: society, the government, and his community. Les did not choose to go to Vietnam, we made him, and we failed in saving him from his past, which became his only reality.

Brendan Troy

**You, Me, and Hannibal Lecter:
The Slippery Edge Between Monotony and Murder**

People inherently have a desire to separate themselves and “rational” society from the mind and actions of a serial killer. But breaking down the barrier, looking back, and recognizing just how thin the barrier is, gives a horror and thrill to the entire serial killer genre. By investigating how incredibly narrow the psychological gap between abnormality and normality are in Jonathan Demme's film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and Thomas Harris's novel *Red Dragon*, we can see the “monstrous” killers in a brand new way, and perhaps notice how similar they are to us. From this perspective, we will discover that Lecter, Dolarhyde, and other such anomalies are actually a direct product of our society, leaving us all terrifyingly responsible.

Paging Dr. Freud

Tuesday, April 7
7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Room E

Emily Hron Weigle

Fever-Dreams: Elements of Freud in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

Set in the crisp days leading up to Halloween, Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* follows the paths of two boys: safe, reflective, William Halloway and wild, unpredictable, untethered, Jim Nightshade. As different as day is from night, yet fast friends till the end, these boys enjoy a relatively quiet existence until their quiet hometown is visited by Cooger and Dark's Combined Shadow Shows and Cross-Continental Pandemonium Theater Company. This mysterious carnival rolls into town at the distinctive time of three in the morning, the time when you "...dream with your eyes open." And indeed, this classic tale of good and evil, as fantastic and mysterious as the carnival it animates, is less fairy tale than fever-dream. This perspective, one in which Bradbury's words are not taken singularly as a conscious narrative, but also as a very distinctive dream, opens *Something Wicked This Way Comes* up to analysis according to dream theory as proposed by Freud. In reference specifically to concepts depicted in Sigmund Freud's *On Dreams*, a better understanding of Bradbury's novel will be presented.

Sara Kanematsu

Pure, Perfect, Performative: The "Transformations" of Female Identity in Anne Sexton's Poetry

Fairy tales are traditionally misogynistic. However, in *Transformations*, Anne Sexton takes this convention and uses it to subvert itself; she masters the use of satire, illustrating Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, as argued in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. A close reading of Sexton's poetry demonstrates how she follows the plot of classic fairy tales yet effortlessly uses literary devices to compel her reader to view gender and identity as essentially false and constructed. By exaggerating and satirizing the stereotypical portrayal of women in fairy tales and relating them to contemporary culture, Sexton champions feminism and challenges society's conception of gender roles and their relationship to identity. She suggests not only that identity should be seen as separate from gender but also that both are performative constructions, and therefore inherently illusive.

Stephanie Palermi

Bombings of the Mind

After Dresden, Germany, was bombed towards the end of World War II, people outside of Germany knew very little about what had happened. Even people who survived were unsure of what they had lived through. *Slaughterhouse-Five* perfectly shows the effect of this apocalyptic event on its main character, Billy Pilgrim. While the psychological effect of his experience did not come fully to light until much later in his life, the stories and theories that Billy makes up for himself are all rooted in his earlier life. Billy does not talk about the war for many years after returning from Dresden, which is an effect seen in many other survivors. Complimenting the fictional narrative of Billy's life is *The End*, a mostly autobiographical work concerning the similar bombing of Hamburg. These survivors expected life as they knew it to end with the bombings, but instead they came out into a new reality.

**O Brother, Where Art Thou?:
Examining the Taboo Nature of Incest in Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden***

Incest is a practice that has been deemed universally taboo not only among humans, but even among primates. Despite the social and biological conventions that overwhelmingly oppose it, recent research has revealed that sexual acts between immediate family members occurs at a much more frequent rate than previously speculated. Why is it if this practice is so detrimental that it occurs not only commonly, but sometimes with normalcy? Only one answer explains this phenomenon: the fact that although most primates, including humans, naturally avoid inbreeding, this avoidance is not purely a biological phenomenon and is in fact significantly driven by social constructs. In his novel *The Cement Garden*, Ian McEwan provides a compelling model of a situation where biological constraints against incest are not enough and thus incestuous behavior thrives as a direct result of all social constructs being eliminated. His work, along with numerous recent anthropologic and psychological studies, proves that old postulates that incest is a behavior that genetics can control are clearly incorrect and need to be reevaluated. Although societal taboos condemning incest do arise out of its deleterious biological affects, biology alone is clearly not a sufficient means of stopping incest and societal constraints largely limit the human desire to inbreed. It is directly because of this phenomenon that incest occurs between the siblings in *The Cement Garden* whose isolation and ignorance of social taboos cause them to engage in sexual acts with each other without even realizing the deleterious consequences of their actions.

Michael Sullivan

**Sleeping Life:
The Device Between Protagonist and Reality in *The Science of Sleep***

In this essay, I explore the role of dreams in the life of protagonist Stephane Miroux from Michel Gondry's *The Science of Sleep* (2006). In Stephane's life, the intersection of his dreams with his waking life put him in a liminal space that serves two basic functions: 1.) to preserve a state of childlike wonderment, akin to the Freudian "pleasure principle," and 2.) to distance him from the inhabitants of his "real" world, and thus prevent him from being hurt by them. As a result, Gondry is telling us that these two functions are essentially one and the same. By returning to an infantile, id-driven state, one shields oneself from the pains and responsibilities that come from adulthood and, likewise, from adult interpersonal relationships. Thus, to revert is to protect, and to mature is to inherit vulnerability.

Waking Up From the American Dream

Wednesday, April 8
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.
Room A

Brittany Burns

Ghost Land: The Repercussions of the Struggle between America's Derelict Past and Its Domineering Present

The unknown and the unfamiliar often find themselves fighting for recognition of their existence among new or mainstream ideologies. Such a power struggle of beliefs is concomitant to the immigrant foundation of America. A land of clashing ethos, America is filled with and haunted by tossed aside ghosts of cultures abandoned at her borders. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* shows such a personal struggle of trying to identify with both the old culture of her ancestry and with being accepted by the dominant culture she has been thrown into. Without a full immersion into either, both cultures lose their sense of reality, creating a ghost story vibe. Neil Gaiman brings this struggle to a fictional playing field in his novel *American Gods* by personifying the internal struggle of incongruous ideas into an epic battle of personified gods and cultures. Together, these novels present an idea of what refuses to be forgotten, of ghosts always present, whether haunting or serene. America becomes a "ghost country;" her inhabitants engaged in a perpetual struggle for their true identity, at war both with the ghost cultures of their pasts and with the dominating cultures of their present, and unable to rest wholly with either.

James Green

Making it Big: Steroids and the American Dream

One of the speakers in Christopher Bell's documentary *Bigger, Stronger, Faster** (2008) mentions that "you got to do what you got to do to win." In recent years, athletes of all levels from high school to the pros have taken this idea to the extreme by using steroids and illegal performance-enhancing drugs. Using Bell's film and Jose Canseco's book, *Juiced*, I aim to show that the poor decisions of these athletes are not to blame for a loss of morality and integrity in society, but are rather the results of their belief in the American Dream, where anyone can achieve fame and fortune through hard work. I hope to show that these athletes' society-driven dreams of a future reality of fame and fortune lure them into the risk of taking steroids. I also aim to resolve the issue of how we should view these athletes as people, and explain how our American culture has given birth to the advent of the steroid era in sports.

Jessica Jaime

The Un-American Dream: A Look at the Blatant Bigotry in *Quiz Show*

The United States has long prided itself on being a melting pot of cultures, where people of all backgrounds are given an equal opportunity to succeed. Though the American Dream was originally a promise of hope offered to all, it has deteriorated to the point that it is now achievable to only a select few. "The Un-American Dream" embraces the flawed, yet prevalent ideology that some people are "more American" than others. The movie *Quiz Show* (1994) depicts the harsh cultural and social boundaries that restrict certain people from achieving their American Dream. We believe ourselves to live in a time that has advanced beyond racism, but the fracturing of the American Dream shows a country still plagued by issues of racial, ethnic, and societal bigotry.

Turning American Dream into Nightmare: the Slasher Film

With the release of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), a new genre of horror film was born. A psychotic killer, himself the victim of parental neglect, enters the homes of suburbia to stalk and murder the unsuspecting teen. The illusion of peaceful suburbia is split with the killer's blade. Parents, police, and principals - too busy with their own dreams and ambitions - fail to protect the teens from gruesome deaths. A survivor is left at the end to avenge the deaths of her peers and save her life by killing the villain. The "final girl" assumes parental authority, missing at the beginning of the film. She lives just long enough to see that the killer she thought was dead returns in the sequel to continue his bloody reign. But can we really blame nurture for the creation of psychopaths? In "Turning American Dream into Nightmare," I discuss how the genre of the slasher film is a critique of America's middle-class family and its failure to protect its youth.

Solome Williams

The Destruction of Utopia in *There Will Be Blood*

This paper examines how the representation of the American Dream in *There Will Be Blood* (2007) reflects historical and modern society's ability to forfeit humanity for success. In reality, the American Dream is a predatory game where people like Daniel Plainview become enraptured in a violent and tormenting world that contemporary society sugarcoats as the supreme aspiration of man. Critical analysis of the film and its themes in *The New York Times* and *The Boston Review* aim to provide evidence that the lust for power, oil, and capitalism is not a dream, but inevitably pits man against nature. From the birth of American industry to the present, man has acted callously in an effort to preserve his fabricated way of life under the ruse of an illusory dream, thus blinding him to external and internal destruction.

Life Imitates Art

Wednesday, April 8
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.
Room B

Antonia Blumberg

Shamans and Cowboys: Mythical Authors of Identity in *At Swim-Two-Birds*

In the spirit of “Dreams, Illusions and Other Realities,” I will discuss the importance of two mythic influences on the theme of identity in Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*. The two mythic threads woven throughout the novel are the ancient Celtic shaman tradition and the American West. I will explore the relation between these two myths, their intersections, and why O’Brien would have used these two in his novel about novel writing. O’Brien himself is an interesting study for the topic of myth. As an author who wrote under a variety of pen names, he experimented with identity and thus became somewhat of a myth. In *At Swim-Two-Birds* the theme of identity converges with myth because the characters are in a way real but also imagined by another author. Heroes from Celtic shaman tradition, with its emphasis on shape shifting and journeys, and from the American West, with its emphasis on initiation and strength, are all mythic characters. They are people who may have been real but who have been authored anew in myth. But there is also something in the identities of cowboy and shaman that enable an author to create narrative and identity. He is an outlaw and a magician.

Lu Gao

The Melody of Mayhem: Calliope as the Soul of the Circus

The carousel wheeled, a great back-drifting lunar dream, the horses thrusting,
the music in-gasped after, while Mr. Cooger, as simple as shadows, as simple as light, as simple as time,
got younger. And younger. And younger. - Ray Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

The circus entices visitors to lose themselves in a world of cotton candy, prancing horses, sideshows and clowns. But what is a circus without music? The calliope’s wheezy melodies mingle with the smell of popcorn and horses to create a distinct lighthearted ambiance. The rusty sighs and staccatos of the calliope hold unrivalled importance in creating the atmosphere of the circus for its visitors. As such, calliope music is indeed the soul of the circus. When author Ray Bradbury twists the calliope’s lighthearted rhythms and crescendos into flat, groaning tones in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the soul of the circus becomes sinister and dark. Bradbury’s funhouses transform into dark abysses, tattoos come to life, and the carousel twists time and age. This analysis explores Bradbury’s dark circus and how his carnival’s calliope has the power to spin a typical carousel into a twisted nightmare. Behind the curtains of Bradbury’s autumn circus, nothing is what it seems. Music has the power to turn melody into mayhem, to turn dreamland into nightmare. Step right up, ladies and gentleman, a sinister world of shadows and magic awaits.

Sarah Hallbauer

Hurston’s Sacred Song: Music in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In my paper, I isolate one distinct culture and focus on the impact of music within it, identifying why this medium is so universally present and what music ultimately offers individuals. Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* proved an appropriate primary text because Hurston used her own experiences as an anthropologist in many black folk communities in order to capture the daily lives of African Americans. Her details are so intimate that many fellow African American authors declared that Hurston’s novel failed to inspire new roles or lifestyles for the race. Many critics pinpoint music as one of these cultural traditions of Hurston’s work that make it a deflection from political change for African Americans. Their arguments

thus act as powerful counterpoints to my argument that Hurston's use of music fosters community as well as reorders that community in favor of a bottom-up design. Through Hurston's repeated use and transformation of music on the porch as a symbol for social activity and the political arena, Hurston ultimately rejects a single power in favor of community but more importantly the power and contribution of each and every individual. Through music, a tradition that has long held an intimate position in African American culture, Hurston transforms the idea of political change from something unrecognizable to something that is within reach for a single community, as possible as the collaboration of musicians on a neighbor's porch.

Bridget Hardy

**Destiny in Deutschland:
Memory and the Imagined Identity**

Photographs show our thoughts on film; they describe the world as only we can see it in our minds. Reality shines out of the paper. However, I do not believe in the virtuous nature of photography. It seems to me that too many people fall victim to this before-mentioned power invested in photographs. The structure that lies beneath the "captured moment" is actually a hidden manipulation performed by the photographer. Discreetly, reality distorts itself into imagined memories, thoughts that foster in our heads. Photography, especially in W. B. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, follows the storyline of a man lost in the present. This wanderer, Austerlitz, follows the forgotten story of his childhood into his hometown. What he finds disappoints him; the product of the photographs is nothing short of unrealistic and false. Furthermore, what is dead appears real in photography, due to the ease at which photographers manipulate time in their work. The truth behind the false reality of photography holds much more significance than many people would like to hear, but I feel that it is the perfect time to begin to question the authority photography has in relation to our memories.

Daniel E. Weidlein

**The Fine Line Between Humor and Racism:
Understanding the Realities of Racism in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled***

Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* (2000) calls into question our acceptance of race through hyperbole of popular culture: he puts a racist minstrel show on network television. The film blurs the line between illusions of racism, where people try to see offense in something innocent, and the reality of racism, when something is offensive but is downplayed by society. The tradition of minstrelsy is prevalent because it makes us question whether humor is a tool of racism. We see an offensive stand up comedy show as well as the "New Millennium Minstrel Show" couple legitimate humor with blatant racism. Lee's satire is clearly over the top in its offensive tone and absurd premise, but it sheds light upon our culture today which sanctions racist humor as a way to escape the realities of racism. Ultimately, Lee suggests - and emphasizes with a mass killing at the end of the film - that humor perpetuates racism and can only transcend racial barriers if it has genuine, rather than sarcastic, intentions.

I Did It My Way

Wednesday, April 8
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.
Banquet Room

James Creech

**Fictional Families:
Realities and Illusions of Familial Relationships
in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Six Degrees of Separation***

From wax museums and holograms to artificial “pleasure cities” such as Las Vegas and Disneyland, we live in a world where fictions are passed off as reality or create a new sense of reality altogether, according to the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco. Our preoccupation with this hyperreality, the blurring of the line between reality and illusion, is a dangerous tryst that can cause us to avoid our problems and lose sight of reality. Such a situation occurs in both Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and John Guare’s *Six Degrees of Separation*, two postmodern dramas that explore the porous boundary between reality and fantasy, as characters in both works establish fictional families. Whether it be George and Martha’s creation of an imaginary son or Flan and Ouisa Kittredge’s attempts to incorporate a complete stranger into their family life, both arrangements are hyperreal constructions that are doomed to failure. Insulating themselves from reality through the creation of a fictional family does not resolve either couple’s problems or alleviate their pain; in fact, it only exacerbates their familial conflicts. But unlike George and Martha, who ultimately realize the destructive influence of their illusions and discard their blinders, the Kittredges never escape the clutches of their fantasies, leaving them little hope for redemption.

Lauren Ige

**Illusions and False Realities:
History and Personal Identity in *Invisible Man***

The concept of a historical truth or reality is merely an illusion. Though history itself is a largely public notion, it contains an implicit bias as it conveys events through the point of view of the individuals who possess enough agency in society to influence this collective public image. In Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the unnamed protagonist suffers from an internal dilemma, struggling to reconcile the expectations of the Brotherhood, the organization which has the power to write history, with his personal desire for individuality. Inherent in any attempt to become a part of history is a compromise of the individual reality to conform to the outward illusion the influential party wishes to convey. However, it is also this inclusion in the public sphere that gives the protagonist a sense of self identity, as his actions throughout his life are largely shaped by outward perception. When he descends into his underground home, he no longer realizes his true personal identity. Through an examination of Ellison’s novel, as well as W.E.B. DuBois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, this paper will examine the African American struggle to construct a personal reality and identity given the confines of a history dominated by the white majority.

Megan Moine

**Postmodern Feminism:
A Restructuring of the “Other” Gender in *Tropic of Orange***

From suffrage to the sexual revolution, American women’s lives have changed drastically. Women now have the power to speak for themselves and challenge patriarchal systems, and subsequently, postmodern feminist theory dismantles categories and deconstructs gender boundaries. In the resulting ambiguity, new ways of thinking about gender and cultural roles can be considered. Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel *Tropic of Orange*, set in the tangled freeways of Los Angeles, explores the concept of postmodern feminism through its multicultural character Emi. While Yamashita develops global networks through Los Angeles and Mexico’s relationship, she simultaneously portrays Emi as a woman set apart from her gender and cultural roles. However, in Emi’s attempts to break down the definition of what limits her, she alienates herself as an “other” that cannot identify with

any one group. Through technology and her tenacious desire to maintain control through autonomy, Emi loses touch with those around her and is dehumanized. In Yamashita's world of globalization, Emi as an outsider cannot find a place among the increasingly integrated heart of Los Angeles.

Haley Nelson

**Tyler Durden and the "Near Life" Experience:
Existentialism in *Fight Club***

When a steady desk job, well-furnished condo, and the other materialistic measures of success fail to make you happy, and the tiny bubbles in an Ikea dining set no longer validate your existence, where do you turn? For Edward Norton's character in the film *Fight Club* (1999), the answer is inward and simultaneously outward in his creation of Tyler Durden, the handsome and charismatic soap salesman who embodies the free spirit the narrator wishes he could be. Through this physical projection of his own alter ego, the narrator teaches himself to find authenticity by rejecting the traditional confines of materialistic life, and quickly realizes that he has opened the door to an entire generation of men who are searching for the same release. Although Tyler Durden preaches what sounds like basic existentialism, he as a projection cannot be considered existentialist by the criteria of Jean-Paul Sartre because his indifference towards death and his goals for Project Mayhem blatantly disregard the narrator's facticity. In this way, Durden renders the narrator's search for authenticity inauthentic by existential standards, and his destruction, not his creation, becomes the narrator's only path to freedom. In the words of Tyler Durden, "It's only after we've lost everything that we are free to do anything."

Hao-Hua Wu

***Quiz Show*: Our Moral Dilemma as an Audience**

There is no nice way to put it. We are constantly being lied to whenever we turn on the television. Commercials are a form of deception, television shows portray dramatic illusions of reality, and even news networks tend to sensationalize fact. In Robert Redford's *Quiz Show* (1994), the portrayal of a scandal of a rigged quiz show leads us as an audience to consider our moral responsibility in keeping honest the false realities our media perpetuates. I will argue that, although we can try to regulate our media, we must recognize that illusion is inherent in entertainment, and the only way we can transcend the deception embodied by the television executives of *Quiz Show* is if we denied ourselves the consumption of popular culture altogether. Such a course of action, however, is not advisable. Illusions are an unavoidable aspect of our lives, and that is a reality we must learn to accept.

Arrested Development

Wednesday, April 8
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.
Pub

Divya Bhamidipati

Serving the Revolution: Teen Films and Freedom

Teen films have always been an escape of sorts for teenagers of any era. They embody the voice and the zeitgeist of a generation, acting as the conduit through which hidden dreams, aspirations, and goals are set free. From sex comedies to horror films, these films have been alternate worlds where teenagers are allowed to run free. Political theorist Hakim Bey refers to these alternate free worlds as Temporary Autonomous Zones, a time, place, or period that allows an individual to work outside the system, with complete autonomy. The TAZs, as they are known, are small rebellions that assert freedom even where there is none. For teenagers, teen films are variants of TAZs that they may never really experience. These films show TAZs in everyday situations, a concept which speaks to the teenagers stuck in the monotony and routine of everyday life. *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) are two such films which especially embody this spirit of autonomy and freedom in the face of oppressive routine. Through their iconic portrayals of ordinary teens, these films functioned as worlds of their own: worlds through which teenagers could find autonomy from the real world. These films afforded teens of the eighties a sense of freedom from the highly regimented and regulated lives that awaited them as adults in an increasingly corporate America. By applying Bey's theory of the TAZ and other theorists' views on individual autonomy, I analyze how these films functioned as autonomous zones, and the effect they had as 'pockets of autonomy' with which teenagers could resonate.

Kate Ikehara

Family Impossibilities: The Effects of the Broken Family on the American Serial Killer

In Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, childhood abandonment and the broken family take the blame of serial killing. Dolarhyde, the troubled serial killer, victimizes ideal American families so that he may destroy what he never experienced as a child. Dolarhyde carries his disturbing childhood with him through his adulthood as a source of anger, which reveals the importance of the environment in which a child is raised. Through psychological interpretation of Dolarhyde's actions and emotion, I argue that the abandonment and the broken family is the cause of serial killing. The reader is able to see the futility of striving for the perfect family through the extreme act of serial murder. Within the novel, families are no longer flawlessly whole, but are disconnected and broken which mimics the real-life progress of the American family. The frequent destruction of the quintessential family in the novel suggests that the perfect family is ultimately unattainable.

Nadine Shu Rong Tan

One, or Two, for *The Road*: Debating the Value of Social Connection in Cormac McCarthy's World of Crisis and Beyond

"Only in solitude do we find ourselves; and in finding ourselves, we find in ourselves all our brothers in solitude," the Spanish essayist Miguel de Umanumo wrote. We each harbor an inherent solitude that allows us to unwind, probe, explore, develop a sense of self and will to be individual - to constructively extract ourselves from the macrocosm and reach our potential. However, the alternative concept of depending upon social connection and extinguishing notions of solitude has found its way into society, creating in the process an aversion, even fear, of being alone. Contemporary social scientists, coupled with Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, suggest the preservation of, or the dependence on, social connection as a means of survival and development. What should be recognized, however, is that solitude should be paired with social connection as a complementary instrument. The unit of inquiry should thus be the product of such an equilibrium, an individual who both values his or her isolation as well as the relationships shared with others.

**Mirages of Progress on the Frontier:
The Effect of Space upon the American Dream**

Since childhood, we are made familiar with the wide, open plains and deserts of the Wild West. Intrinsic with this notion of emptiness is the potential to freely develop - the cornerstone of the American identity and its system of free enterprise capitalism. However, as both recent scholarship and common knowledge of the American West reveals, these terrains were not devoid of a presence and were, rather, occupied by Native American tribes and a rich environment, both of which were subsequently annihilated in the name of progress by the spread of industry and westward expansion of the blooming American nation. This presentation aims to highlight the differing perceptions of emptiness and space in both the Western genre and the politics of the United States and Native American nations which populated the region. Furthermore, it will discuss how these outlooks carry over into the present in varying forms of environmental policy and international diplomacy and the necessity of altering some of the nation's aged opinions regarding development and space.

Lu Zhang

**Finding the Internal in the Confines of External Illusions:
The Struggle of the Immigrant Daughter in *The Woman Warrior* and *Saving Face***

Chinese American literature has seen an overwhelming abundance of works focusing on the difficulties of mother-daughter relationships in immigrant families. This paper concentrates on two Chinese American daughters struggling to find their identity and worth with their mothers in the memoir *The Woman Warrior* and in the film *Saving Face* (2004). Their dynamics with their respective mothers are rooted in the familial definition of the child as the fulfillment site of filial obligations. Their dynamics with the larger society are based on cultural definitions of the Chinese immigrant and their gender roles as the female. However, these definitions are illusionary constructions from indefinite sources that are outside the individuality internal for both of these women. Thus, the role and construction of the immigrant daughter as the defining label for these two women is an illusionary conglomerate from external definitions. Their struggles to define themselves by internal individuality rather than external constructions allow these women to find what is beyond the illusion that so overwhelms and clouds their life, and, consequently, these daughters not only discover their own worth but the hidden worth of their mothers as well.

Because I Said So

Wednesday, April 8
5:00 - 6:15 p.m.
Room C

Matthew Fagre

Crusading Killer: 19th Century Christian Moral Superiority in Marie Belloc Lowndes's *The Lodger*

Mr. Sleuth, the “Lodger” in question, is a shadowy middle class man who tirelessly studies the Bible and Cruden’s *Concordance* by day and roams the foggy alleys of London by night, seeking out drunken women to exact divine vengeance. His life draws eerie parallels to that of Alexander Cruden, author of the *Concordance* over which Mr. Sleuth obsesses. They both spent time in madhouses under dubious charges, had an intense commitment to the Holy Scripture, and saw their calling to correct the morals of a decadent English society. The two of them also saw the paradox that most Englishmen had reconciled: the contradiction of a pious tradition striving to maintain morals while converting the heathens of conquered territories and the immoral realities of promiscuity and violence at home and abroad. Through analysis of Lowndes’s text and Cruden’s life, as well as the missionary traditions of English Christians, I attempt to discover how a society could deny the duality of its ideals and reality, and why those who saw the contradiction were labeled “insane.”

Jason Kehe

Philip Pullman and the Death of God: How Salvation is Achieved in a Post-God World

The postmodern apocalypticist, as Elizabeth K. Rosen and others have suggested, has taken Nietzsche’s famous dictum as gospel and written end-of-the-world narratives without God, effectively undermining the traditional religiosity of the apocalyptic myth. Philip Pullman, in perhaps the most literal example of this trend toward secularization, “kills” God in his fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*, thus raising one of the most basic questions: What does a godless end - which in Pullman’s case becomes a godless beginning - mean for salvation? For Pullman, an outspoken atheist (though some would argue an unwitting pantheist), religion is mere illusion, a kind of false optimism, manufactured by a powerful elite. In the world of *His Dark Materials*, eschatological salvation does not presuppose religiosity; a New Jerusalem does not cometh down out of heaven for Pullman’s characters. Man falls, but in falling makes his own salvation. In the end, Lyra, Pullman’s protagonist, realizes that she must build her own Republic of Heaven, and that a life of true and honest stories, free of the corrupting illusion of religiosity, is what makes for a meaningful, optimistic end.

Eunice S. Lee

Magic Mirrors, Gold Slippers, and Dandelion Hair: Female Archetypes and Gender Roles in Anne Sexton’s *Transformations*

In *Transformations*, Anne Sexton offers readers adaptations of classic Brothers Grimm fairy tales. Through her interpretations, Sexton presents a subversive commentary on the burdens and fears of women in a society shaped by male dominance. This patriarchal society not only existed in the past, when tales were created of princes saving their damsels in distress, but has continued into the present. While the original Brothers Grimm fairy tales present a fantastical world that conditions children to accept traditional gender roles, Sexton’s transformed stories explore and reveal the grim reality behind these fantasies and happy endings. By demonstrating that these endings are only happy for characters who comply with the gender and sexual norms of a patriarchal society, Sexton disrupts the mode of closure that “happily ever afters” purport to offer.

Katharine G. Marder

**Indexical Actuality in *Blood Meridian*:
An Absurdist Crisis**

The bleak and amoral world of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* presents a significant challenge to the popular Western genre. The Western hero - the champion of justice among the lawlessness of the frontier - must possess metaphysical freedom of will to be considered morally responsible or "heroic." McCarthy's narration downplays human agency and hints at the existence of possible worlds, which severely undermines the potential for free will within the world of *Blood Meridian*.

We usually consider our world to be the only actual world in existence. The theory of modal realism, however, suggests that our world is really just one among many "possible worlds," privileged only by indexical actuality, or the fact that we happen to live in it. The existence of possible worlds in *Blood Meridian* - and the merely indexical actuality of McCarthy's amoral universe - prohibits the existence of free will in the novel and creates for readers the crisis of absurdism, or an irreconcilable gulf between the search for meaning and the impossibility of finding such meaning in McCarthy's world. By replacing the emergent morality of the typical Western novel with a venture into the absurd, McCarthy presents a radical alternative to the contrived myth of the moral West.

Kimberley Monks

**Simulations in Society:
Illusions of Success in *The Importance of Being Earnest***

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* provides a portrait of upper class life in England in the late 1890s, whose characters appear laughably trivial. However, the triviality hides a disturbing undercurrent; there is no substance to these people's lives. As Lady Bracknell says of her nephew Algernon, "He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?" Jean Baudrillard describes the simulacrum as a counterfeit replication of something that comes to precede that which it is modeled on, and eventually signals the absence of that thing rather than its presence. The play shows that many signs of upper class success such as birth, connections, wealth, appearance, behavior, and participation in social rituals are easily feigned and have lost their meaning. Lady Bracknell, the mouthpiece of society, shows the illusory nature of the upper class standards even as she rigidly enforces them; as she interviews Jack, her prospective son-in-law, she seems to have a strict set of standards, but only reveals the preponderance of appearances in her society. The standards on which the stratification of English society is based are mere illusions, and the only thing that separates the upper classes from the lower is knowledge of the illusion. The deceptive standards of success reveal how meaningless class differentiation in England was.

Brian Schriver

**Freedom from Morality:
Releasing the True Human**

Independent human morality is an illusion. There exists no distinct code of ethics in the absence of society. Instead the notion of right and wrong emerges simply to meet the need of society, proving that in the absence of extraneous human contact, morals would simply not exist. Free from such moral chains, man is animalistic and seeks two things: survival and pleasure. I analyzed the characters of Miranda Grey and Frederick Clegg in John Fowles's novel *The Collector* to explore the development of an internal ethics system within modern day individuals and the break from the illusion of natural morals. To disprove the idea of genetically imprinted morals, I sought the origin of ethics and examined the differing moral guidelines throughout time, and in unique regions. This underlying notion contradicts common belief, throwing the world into chaos by altering the very social laws which control humankind; there is no universal right or wrong.

Aggravated Assault

Wednesday, April 8
7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Room A

Charles Capron

“He killed my wife and took away my fucking memory”: Memory, Relationships and Violence in Identity Formation and Fracture

This paper explores how and why violence has the power to fracture identity and can lead to the breakdown of a coherent sense of self. By using Locke's theory of memory and identity formation, studies on social bonds and identity, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) clinical studies, we can examine how memory, social relationships, and violence are related. I use the Christopher Nolan film *Memento* (2000) to examine in depth the relationship between memory, relationships and identity and how the fracture of one can lead to the fracture of the other. The paper then explores similarities between *Memento* and PTSD to explore the power of violence to disrupt identity and one's perception of reality.

Nicole Cid

Love Hurts: Exploring the Connection between Love and Violence in Carver

Terri in Carver's short story "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love" presents the problem of abuse within intimate partner relationships. Her insistence that her abusive ex-lover Ed's brutal and violent behavior toward her was somehow rooted in an intense love for her prompts research on how love and violence could ever exist in the same intimate space. It poses the question of whether love and abuse are dependent upon one another or connected in some way. Love and abuse become more and more entangled through analysis of psychological, sociological and other scientific studies, and eventually the two actually begin looking strangely similar. Within Carver's work, both violent and nonviolent abuse serve the purpose of renewing feelings of tenderness and romance, a reversion to what psychological studies title the "renewed honeymoon." But as the story progresses, this tactic ceases to expedite a return to the "gaga" state that characterizes intense feelings of romantic love, and simply leads relationships farther and farther into the darkness of abuse. Is love, then, something forever waning, requiring some means of holding on to old romantic feelings to preserve it? Carver's story paints love as a fading light and abuse, accordingly, as some desperate attempt to keep love alive.

Sheridan Davis

Scandalous Spotlights and Destructive Dreams: The Jaded Illusions and Realities of *Chicago*

Chicago can be summed up in the words of Billy Flynn: "It's a three ring circus. These trials, the world. It's all a three ring circus. It's showbusiness." Yet showbusiness is more than just the "razzle-dazzle" of the stage; as the morality of the movie - or lack thereof - shows, the illusion of stardom is actually more of a delusion. The movie's desperate stardom-seekers lie, cheat, and backstab one another - and for what? For 15 minutes of fame? Although they aim for the spotlight, the women of *Chicago* can only reach the limelight; as their personal lives parallel their professional ones, they sell their souls in an attempt to succeed in showbusiness. But when all is said and done, the emptiness of trading self for the stage proves to be the downfall of the women, making them one-dimensional "characters" in a show rather than real people. Their illusory alter-egos become more important than their real selves as the dream of stardom supersedes the reality. But hey, that's showbusiness.

Melanie Lynch

**Idealism in Wide-Open Spaces?:
The Dark Reality Behind the Mythos of the American West**

“Why west? It’s the way you go out here...
No one goes the other way. It would be stupid.” - Marjorie Standiford, *The Speed Queen*

Although serial killer Marjory Standiford idealizes the American West in Stewart O’Nan’s *The Speed Queen*, she inevitably discovers a world of violence, confusion, and isolation brimming beneath the surface. This unraveling of the mythic American West makes us question its hypnotic attraction throughout history and into the present, and, even more importantly, the cause of the pervading sense of ruin and despair. After establishing a historic cycle of idyllic dreams and crushed hopes, one in which the past truly does “haunt” the present, I will examine the horrific reality lying behind the myth of the West. From a psychological perspective, the unifying factor dismantling the Western mythos lies in the havoc that wide-open spaces wreak on the mind. The inability to anthropomorphize the West leads to feelings of isolation, while a lack of reference points and boundaries destroys any sense of self and security. The true reality of the West, whether or not society can accept it, is an alienating world of despair harmonizing with the violence of serial killers.

Emanuel Powell III

**Bastard of Society:
Comparison of Social Prejudice and the Serial Killer**

For some, racism, sexism, and homophobia are attitudes of the past. We have entered a golden century headlined with pro-choice laws, legalized gay marriage, and most importantly an African American president. Despite these accomplishments, the underlying truth remains constant. Studies are still finding that “three times as many African American men were added to the nation’s prison systems than were added to colleges during the last two decades,” that gay marriage rights are consistently being taken away by the public, and “in 2007, women who were full-time wage and salary workers earned 80 percent of their male counterpart’s salary.” Some would say that society has turned a new leaf, but the guilt on its hands remains as bloody as any serial killer’s. It is my argument that the historical degradation of minority groups by society begets the serial killer, instigating his/her/hir behavior as much, if not more than, any other influence the killer comes in contact with. Thus, the serial killer is not an aberration of society but the natural consequence of a system that perpetuates prejudice.

Tatiana Taylor

**What Makes a Monster:
Social Fears as Monstrous Creatures in *Harry Potter***

What defines a monster? Monsters are the horrid, ferocious, and evil creatures of fantasy tales. They are the beasts that cause mayhem, destruction, and terror. But monsters also take on less grotesque appearances. They are the neighbor’s little dog that digs up your rose bushes or the unruly child that throws tantrums and smashes your fine china. Martin Fradley in *Framing Monsters* explains that monsters are a reflection of “the society that spawned them, a society that perpetually fantasizes monstrous threats to its safety and security.” *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is full of magical beings, but it is the threatening creatures that are defined as monstrous. The creation of monsters serves to express and even exaggerate human fears. The word “monster” itself comes from the Latin verb *monstrare*, meaning “to show” or “to reveal.” Monsters are inherently demonstrative, revealing our desire to find a scapegoat for our fears and anxieties. The defeat of human villains, like *Harry Potter*’s Lord Voldemort, especially reflects society’s yearning for greater world safety from malevolent people. Every vanquished monster creates a sense of closure. Monsters are a product of social fears and anxieties that manifest themselves as nightmare creatures.

You Don't Know Me

Wednesday, April 8
7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Room B

Ayushi Gummadi

Degrees of Blackness: Race Relations in *Six Degrees of Separation*

Six Degrees of Separation comments on the different levels of black social acceptance. As Paul, a young black man, initially presents himself as Sidney Poitier's son to the Kittredges, an upper-class Caucasian couple, he is warmly received into their home. However, once his fraudulence is exposed, he is simply, as another one of the duped elite comments, a "black kid crack addict," unwelcome into the privileged circles of the white upper-class families. Guare presents this social acceptance as a result of the need for white superiority, effectively commenting that this stigmatizing is not only unfair but also the result of unwarranted discriminations. These different perceptions of blacks can be explained by Robyn Wiegman's theory on the negation of masculine sameness, which reaffirms white superiority by relegating black males to lower positions. When Paul's true identity as a confidence man, not Poitier's son, is revealed, the Kittredges' change of attitude towards him indicates not only the importance of celebrity and naming to the white upper class - as race is relegated to a less important position when Paul is aligned to celebrity - but also the emphasis placed on race when celebrity is not a factor. However, close analysis reveals the many similarities between Flan Kittredge and Paul; although Flan is white and a member of the elite upper class, he is a deceiver just like Paul because of his underground art dealings. However, Flan negates their similarities by presenting himself as a respectable member of the upper class and condemning Paul in order to retain his white superiority. Ultimately, the fact that Flan and Paul are not truly different exposes the underlying racism in the text, which Guare argues is unjustifiable.

Ella Kidron

Aids to AIDS: How Pop Culture Influences Society's Perception of AIDS

"Fear of touching" is the principal prohibition of what Sigmund Freud defines as "taboo". Anyone who violates a taboo by coming in contact with something that is taboo is said to also be taboo. According to Freud taboo has become the ordinary legislation in communities that are affected by it. Today the popular media are the legislators of taboo; they tell us what to fear or not fear, and how to treat those taboo objects. Though there is initially scientific or other scholarly evidence that provokes the media to label something as taboo, it is often only a kernel of very underdeveloped, unexplored thought. The popular media's labeling of AIDS as something that should be feared in the 1980s and 1990s has influenced the way people behave around the disease and how they treat AIDS victims. This paper serves to discuss the influence and consequences of the popular media's behavior on AIDS victims through an exploration of Mark Doty's *Heaven's Coast*, a memoir he wrote after losing his lover, Wally, to AIDS.

Jennifer Marie Lewis

Honest Illusions: The Truth in the Magic of Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

Literally named, "The City of Angels," Los Angeles promises sunshine, warmth, and an economy based on storytelling and illusions. However, achieving success in the romanticized Hollywood industry is an opportunity reserved for the wealthy and privileged of the city. The poor, homeless, and illegal are forced to exist in a gritty reality, notably separate from the idealistic images associated with Hollywood. Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Tropic of Orange* paints a different picture, in which the poor and the struggling live lives of fantastic events and magical encounters. These moments of enchantment serve to highlight the

networks created by these poorer citizens, specifically the homeless, the drug dealers, and the illegal immigrants, who exert an unnoticed but incredible control over all aspects of city life. Further, as these sub-factions of the city's population interact and exchange, a wide-spreading equalization occurs: everyone with an orange becomes part of a drug ring; the homeless become producers, directors, and talent for a main news network; and emigrating Mexicans bring with them the Tropic of Cancer, warping the physicality of Southern California.

Annalise Moberg

**The Counterpublic:
A Subconscious Identification with Oppressive State Structures**

In Gloria Naylor's short story "The Two," a gang of young African American men viciously rapes a young African American lesbian. While on the surface this unprovoked act of brutal violence appears to be a simple struggle between good and evil, the story provokes an exploration into the shades of gray surrounding the nature of oppression and the human need to reject marginalizing forces. I examine how the gang is simultaneously oppressed and oppressor. I explore the gang's attempt to reject this oppression by forming an anti-state autonomous group. I implement Jose Munoz's theory of counterpublic in order to shed light upon the gang's need to disassociate from the racist forces around them and their ultimate failure to do so because of their own subconscious identification with state structures. I also discuss the hierarchical nature of oppression and violence. Finally, I use Andrea Smith's discussion on rape as a form of conquest in order to uncover how the gang uses rape in order to implement the dominant sexual structures of patriarchy, thereby affirming their own violent masculine control.

Cassandra Stover

**Carnival Noir:
A Nightmare Motif in *Strangers on a Train***

Often hailed as the Master of Suspense, legendary director Alfred Hitchcock thrived on exploiting the carnivalesque. With *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the master turned his vision to the carnival as a setting of violence, exemplifying the concept of "carnival noir," a facet of film noir that utilizes the carnival as a significant part of the story, as a backdrop to the genre's sinister themes, seemingly contradictory to the universal understanding of the spectacle as harmless entertainment. Hitchcock's use of carnival transcends the obvious literal and figurative contrasts; while bright lights and family atmosphere serve as a façade to the subconscious of brutal strangling and treachery among the shadows, Hitchcock also delves into complex metaphor, weaving the carnival throughout the film and into the audience's unconscious with haunting visual and aural recollections. This dark, symbol-laden thriller epitomizes carnival noir, and careful exploration of carnival's violent origins reveals why the setting of carnival is ideally suited to convey noir's gritty themes.

Reflections and Revelations

Wednesday, April 8

7:15 - 8:30 p.m.

Banquet Room

Will Eisenberg

Reflections of a Serial Killer: *American Psycho* and Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage"

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan describes in his theory of "The Mirror Stage" that an infant experiences a state of "helplessness" when he first looks at his own reflection and identifies himself as the unified body he sees but is too uncoordinated to control it. As Lacan describes, the subject is permanently captivated by his own image. This "imaginary other," which only exists through imaginary identifications, becomes a threatening rival to the subject and causes a jealous and aggressive hostility within. In my paper, I intend to use Lacan's psychoanalytical theory to understand what it is that drives Patrick Bateman, the protagonist (and antagonist) of Mary Harron's film *American Psycho* (2000). By assuming a Lacanian interpretation of the film, I hope to reconcile the inherent contradiction of Patrick Bateman's lifestyle: he is a seemingly perfect person by day - a happy, healthy stockbroker on Wall Street - but a serial killer by night. I will argue that Bateman's aggression toward himself and others is caused by his narcissistic view of his "imaginary other." Patrick Bateman becomes destructive in an attempt to make himself feel as though he, the "subject," is the "other" - the sculpted, admirable, VP of Pierce and Pierce whom he not only sees in the mirror, but envies.

Mac Fiskien

Seeing the World through Synecdoche: Why Even Bother?

This paper compares Charlie Kaufman's film, *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) with Italo Calvino's book, *Invisible Cities*, arguing that the two works, when examined together, demonstrate the necessity of metaphor, myth, and synecdoche. In both texts, the protagonist attempts to make sense of extremely complex, boundless subjects. *Synecdoche's* lead Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) tries to depict all of life's essential truth in a play, while in *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo aims to bring the experience of a place to a man who has never even seen it. Caden becomes increasingly frustrated with the task of accurately representing so much in a single play, faced with the problem that no matter how close art comes to real life it will never be identical, and that he is unable to recreate exactly the meaning that he sees in life. Polo, by contrast, uses muddled metaphors and fables, avoiding detail, and comes away with a more successful and appropriate representation of his subject. The success of the metaphorical over the definite attests to the importance of fanciful, emotional representation as a device for us to make sense of material reality.

Lauren Maldonado

Crafting her own Dangerous Liaison: Reflections of the Marquise de Merteuil's Identity in Stephen Frears' *Dangerous Liaisons*

"Illusions are by their nature sweet." - Marquise de Merteuil, *Dangerous Liaisons*

Stephen Frears' use of mirrors in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) elucidates the tension provoked by the dual relationship of the Marquise de Merteuil's illusionary and corporal realities. Through examining the ways in which the film uses this visual device to convey Merteuil's use of a self-empowering illusionary identity to conceal her true vulnerability, the viewer gains insight on the power of the mirror in film to underscore the complexity of a character's identity. I conducted this research in order to raise the audience's awareness of the many layers of Merteuil's character, who is often superficially misinterpreted to be no more than an evil villainess solely interested in her own self-glorification. My work fits in the larger academic discussion of "Dreams,

Illusions, and Other Realities” by highlighting the ways in which the use of an illusion can not only serve to help empower its creator, but also serve as a creative means for a filmmaker to conceive the complexity of a character’s true identity in his art.

James Miao

A Modern Jormungand

Time is forever and fleeting, a moment and an eternity bound together in a single fleeting reality. Humanity, limited by our flesh and the constraints of physics, can never understand the nature of time and must resort to living out endless cycles of repeated behavior. We think, we feel, we dream, but each of these different realities is incomplete. Trapped in our linear relationship to time, we end up eternally returning to the same fixed point, the most comfortable and familiar state of existence. This Nietzschean eternal return is illustrated through the characters in Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*. Faced with what seems to be the end of their society, the super heroes of *Watchmen* revert to old patterns, inadvertently embracing their former methods and mimicking their earlier careers in a perfect reflection. Beset with apocalypse, the Watchmen return to genesis. The one character who appears to experience true liberation from the cyclic mode of thought is Dr. Manhattan. Blessed or cursed with a non-linear view of time, Dr. Manhattan is able to break free of traditional codes of morals and ethics. It is the very essence of humanity to be restricted by our insufficient view of time and Manhattan’s ethical metamorphosis demonstrates that the less humanity one retains, the easier it is to escape the eternal return.

Laura Nelson

The Dichotomy of Villainy: Parameters of Evil in Modern and Multicultural Westerns

The classic shoot-‘em-up Western scenario has become as ubiquitous as Billy the Kid: as the villain dies face down in the dirt of Front Street, the hero rides into the sunset, woman by his side, unruffled by the bloodshed, buckshot and chaos left in his wake. Cut-and-dry justice is served. But in reality, this scenario forms too much of a dichotomy between hero and villain, too much of a set-up that assumes good and evil can be easily delineated. Based on close-readings from Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian* and Michael Thelwell’s *The Harder They Come*, it is clear that the line between good and evil often zigs and zags in unexpected and morally confusing ways. As frontiers in America and worldwide reluctantly develop into societies, some behaviors towards living creatures can remain excusable - lynching a cattle thief, for example - whereas some, like abusing a horse or shooting an unarmed Rastafarian, are seen as vicious and unnecessary. What type of violence, if any, is necessary for survival or for revenge? Is violence for the sake of violence ever excusable? The decisions made by characters within these works determine the social constructs and futures of their societies.

Declaration of Codependence

Wednesday, April 8
7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Pub

Colleen Brosnan

Like Father, Like Son: The Patriarchal Breeding of Serial Killers in America

Although patriarchy is an accepted institution in American society, its long-term effects can cause lasting psychological damage. In the context of serial killing, a father's superiority complex, and the conscious imposition of this complex onto his son, can eventually lead to cannibalism and other sadistic behavior. Through the first-hand account of *Zombie's* Quentin and the real life horrors performed by Jeffrey Dahmer, it is clear that a father's urge to maintain this patriarchal structure can be so strong that it leads to the tacit approval of his son's violent, yet dominant actions. Ultimately, serial killing becomes a dual attempt to seek approval and ascend the patriarchal throne.

Sydney Morical

So Close But So Far Apart: Identifying and Reconciling the Innumerable Perceptions of Love

"I love you." These three little words, said so often without thinking, form a confession of the most powerful human emotion, the driving force behind all benevolence. But what do they mean? What does it mean to love? While a universal feeling, love is determined individually. In trying to reconcile these different perspectives of love, there is naturally conflict over the "best" way to properly convey love, based off of differing perceptions of what people deserve. Graham Green's *The End of the Affair* portrays the consequences of this communication barrier, following a couple after their breakup. Their discrepant opinions of love and their differing expressions of it ultimately lead to their separation both emotionally, and later, physically. Philosophically examining their discrepant opinions of love and differing demonstrations both ethically and religiously, it's contended that tangible conveyance only partially represents the extent of love and that, while effectiveness in conveying love makes the process "easier," the power and depth of love is measured by the recognition of these differences in opinion and the attempt to reconcile, becoming "one" in love.

Alena Nordholm

Through the Peeping Hole: The Illusion of Belonging Through Voyeurism in *The Lives of Others*

This essay discusses the role of voyeurism in the movie, *The Lives of Others* (2006), where the director, Florian Henckel Von Donnersmark, deftly weaves together the interrelationships of voyeurism, love, and a sense of belonging in the German Democratic Republic-controlled East Germany. Von Donnersmark's treatment of voyeurism goes beyond Sigmund Freud's simplistic diagnosis of voyeurism and scopophilia. Freud treats these diagnoses as habits that become perversions in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Rather than becoming a perverse habit, Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler's (Ulrich Mühe) observations bond himself to the lives of those he observes. This dynamic bond changes our previously established concepts of love, belonging, and the methods through which these two integral human necessities are acquired.

Molly Underwood

Photographic Memory?

In both W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000), photography and memory play pivotal roles in twisting the way in which humans preserve events in their lives. In *Memento*, the main character, Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) has no short term memory. He is seeking vengeance against his wife's killer, knowing he will not remember accomplishing

his task with a memento, a photograph. In *Austerlitz*, the title character is searching for his personal history. As a child during World War II, he was sent to England as a refugee but has no idea what happened to his parents. According to Samuel Pane in his article “Trauma Obscura: Photographic Media in W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*,” Austerlitz uses photographs as a “counter-memory”. Unlike Austerlitz, Leonard uses photos as a replacement for his memory, supporting John Berger’s claim in *About Looking* that, before the invention of the camera the function of a photograph was fulfilled by memory. While both Leonard and Austerlitz’s photographs depend on context for their meaning, they use photography to serve two different purposes; Leonard uses photographs in place of memory itself, and proves that this system is just as subjective and faulty as memory, and Austerlitz uses photographs to serve as another memory in an attempt to unburden his mind.

Pay No Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain

Wednesday, April 8
7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Room C

Mitchell Golden

Edward Scissorhands vs. The Cleavers: “Ideal” Families and their Effect on Children

For decades, tragic heroes in film have tried suffocating their problems through rampant materialism and ignorant optimism. The climax of the film becomes the moment that those suppressed problems explode in the face of the protagonists, who can no longer hide behind a façade of happiness. Face it, *Leave it to Beaver* families do not exist.

Materialistic America has ruled society since the rise from the Great Depression. As middle class families moved to the suburbs, they aspired to economic well being. More importantly, they always had to “keep up with the Joneses.” In *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), Tim Burton examines and criticizes the concept of the perfect middle class family, and its effect on society. Between the prioritization of material wealth and the attempt to present the image of a perfect and happy family, the idea of an ideal middle class family has the potential to permanently scar youth. Hiding problems with money and a smile causes strife within families, and prevents the solution of those problems. *Edward Scissorhands* thrusts real life problems through the pastel colored house walls, bringing reality back to the family.

Susan Y. Lee

Billy the Kid and His Fight for Reality

Billy the Kid is the definitive icon of the lawless West, existing in a dualistic world in which his life is transformed from that of a common criminal to that of a glorified and mythologized frontier hero. Michael Ondaatje uses his authorial prowess to fashion the innermost thoughts of Billy in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, largely through the medium of poetry. Ondaatje captures the duality of Billy’s character in poems, for Billy is both the hero as a celebrated gunslinger and the villain as a ruthless killer. Furthermore, Ondaatje develops an innovative style called “prose-poem,” wherein the text is comprised of prose deftly injected with poetical verses. This technique enables Ondaatje to exemplify how thin the line separating sanity and insanity is, for he describes the challenges Billy constantly faces within a changing environment. Billy also struggles to mediate competing desires, as his artistic vision is often marred by his physical capabilities. Ondaatje paints a world of extreme violence, and its omnipresence is responsible for the creation of a skewed reality in which Billy lives; he shows that Billy’s lack of ownership for his murderous acts is the only way for the gunfighter to mitigate the conflict that arises when the aesthetic clashes with the physical.

Grace Lee

Ignorance is Bliss: Exploring Truth, Happiness, and Hollywood Clichés with *Watchmen*

In Hollywood struggles between maintaining a façade of bliss and confronting a harsh reality, the fearless protagonist always chooses to brave the unknown in favor of truth over happiness. For example, Neo from *The Matrix* (1999) takes the red pill without a second thought, launching him into cruel actuality where all life is under constant danger and all food is hopelessly bland. Truman from *The Truman Show* (1998) eagerly skips out of the alternate dimension that TV crews have constructed for him into a chaotic world of disorder and uncertainty. But if the idealistic trappings of Hollywood filmmaking are removed, how much is the brutal truth actually preferred over the selfish relief of escapism?

Ozymandias and Dr. Manhattan of *Watchmen* agree with countless philosophers when they claim that happiness is the prerogative of humankind, far more valued than truth. Boldly abandoning contentment for a strange reality is a charming story

device in movies, but it is utterly impractical in reality. Though Ozymandias obliterates millions of people in his plot to achieve world peace, I will prove that his end goal of international harmony is shown to be not only successfully accomplished but ironically heroic.

Ann Li

**Order Above All Else:
Reexamining *Manhattan Transfer* and its Political Implications**

“Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” - Jean-Jacques Rousseau

For many, *Manhattan Transfer* is a Romantic critique of rising capitalist culture and the promise of the American Dream. In this text, characters attempt to navigate their various ways through the chaos of New York City, perpetuating the illusion that hard work and ambition will guarantee a formulaic success within the modern city. The characters appear to stay within such an oppressive and dehumanizing system out of false hope for advancement, but closer examination of the characters' dialogue reveals that their true motivation for staying is fear. Facing the disparate and incongruous forms of the city without this system's guidance is much more frightening than merely supporting an already established and institutionalized hierarchy. Ultimately, these characters make a conscious choice to chase the illusory American Dream rather than truly break free of the strict values and boundaries of the new capitalist order. Despite society's idealization of freedom and individuality, inhabitants of the city cannot help but choose order and structure over true equality.

Michael Stampler

Visual Duality: Illusion and Reality Within Ingmar Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel*

The horse-drawn circus cars, silhouetted by a cloud-filled sky, pass through the Swedish countryside. This is the opening shot of Ingmar Bergman's film *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953). In the next shot, the audience members continue to view the circus cars, but realize that they are simply viewing the cars' reflections in a pool of mud on the ground, a filmic technique that calls attention to representations of reality, perhaps distorted reflections of reality, as opposed to actual truth, emphasizing the prevalence of façade and illusion. In the film, the circus exemplifies this illusory façade, as it brings entertainment and a sense of grandeur to its audience, while it actually faces deeply rooted turmoil in that it is struggling financially, about to close, and its performers' personal lives are falling apart. Bergman uses the circus as the setting for the main focus of the film, a broken relationship between a man and a woman. Throughout *Sawdust and Tinsel*, Bergman utilizes various filmic techniques to emphasize the presence of illusions not only in the circus but also in love, playing off of both the characters' and the audience's idealized conceptions of pure, true love, then shattering these perceptions of love with images that represent the harsh reality of the situation. Perhaps, in this sense, the circus serves to represent this broken love. Bergman's technique of showing the audience an image that cues automatic emotional responses associated with common perceptions of true, pure, idealized love followed by an image that completely turns this notion on its head functions as a sort of “reveal,” a sudden, surprising reminder that things are not as they seem. What's more, these reveals often depict both the images of idealization and those of shattered expectations within the same shot, using a technique called deep focus, which allows the audience to view both the foreground and background of a shot in complete clarity simultaneously. In this sense, Bergman conveys the film's message through his ability to show the audience the whole picture, both literally and figuratively, forcing the audience to see the turmoil within the idealized images of love, to see the circus's sawdust and its tinsel simultaneously. Some film theorists, such as Andre Bazin, assert that showing more information within a single shot is more truthful than the alternative, as the filmmakers cannot deceive the audience through the use of editing. Others, such as Joe Heumann, who discusses the technique of deep focus more specifically, view the concept of deep focus as a filmic optical illusion, impossible to achieve in reality with the human eye. Perhaps Bergman's filmic technique represents an attempt to reveal certain truths through a perspective that is visually impossible in nature in order to emphasize the inability of the characters within the film to see these truths. While the façades and illusions associated with the circus and with love are underscored throughout *Sawdust and Tinsel*, perhaps they are not as significant as the dualities presented through the visual combination of these illusions with representations of reality.

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We thank our wonderful students.